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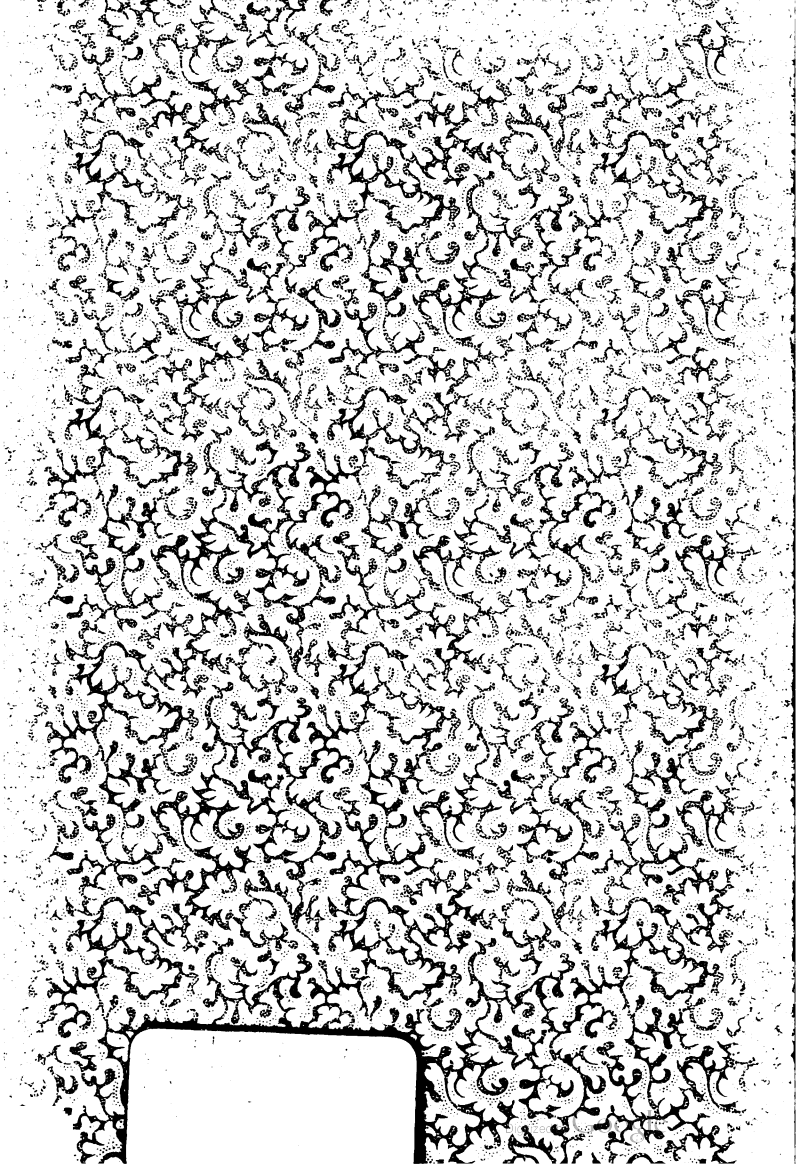
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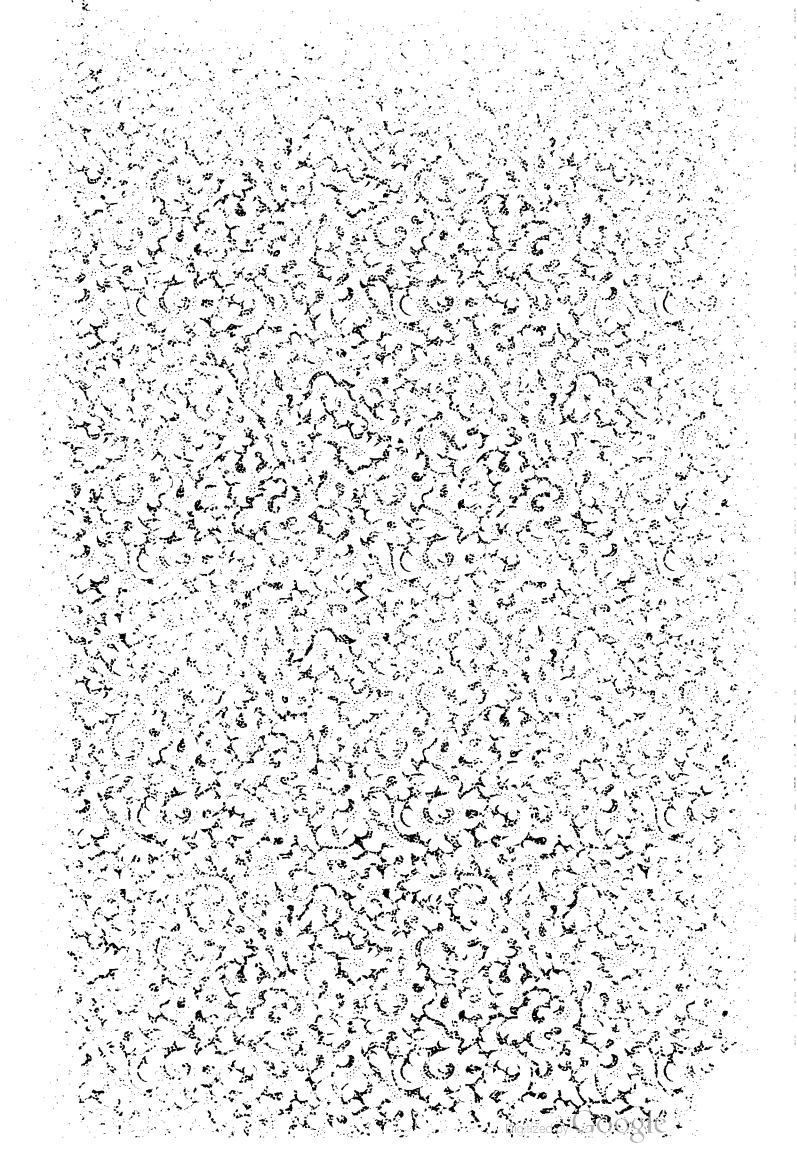
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ARNOLDS RESOLVE.







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BY

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ARNOLD'S RESOLVE.

CHAPTER I.

Sore has the battle been, but victory
Crowned me as evening fell.—*B. M.*

ARNOLD HOULTON'S resolve was taken. The light of conscience was too clear to be mistaken. For days and nights he had fought the foe step by step. The tempter, so ready to adapt his snares, had striven to entangle the struggling man in his net, to confuse his sense of right and wrong, but had been driven off the field and vanquished.

Arnold Houlton's conviction was now firmly rooted; he would not judge another; "to his own master he standeth or falleth," but the calling by which he was living, *to him at least*, was the price of blood, the price of the bodies and souls of men. At *any cost* it must be abandoned; this much was clear. What then? he knew not. As yet he had not the full-grown faith of the child of God, who could leave all without fear or doubt in a heavenly Father's hand. Arnold was only struggling towards the true light, but the rays which he scarcely saw, or saw so dimly and distantly as yet, were drawing him with the all-powerful attraction of light to the

Day Spring from on high. Had he counted the cost? He thought so. Perhaps it was not yet, in loving mercy, *all* revealed to him.

It may be that to him even now the loving Lord was saying, though his ear was not yet practised to catch the strain, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."

Arnold had taken his resolve to go and seek his father, and tell him he must relinquish the coveted partnership, the goodly income just placed within his grasp. His approaching marriage, the house in the act of furnishing for himself and bride, these must be foregone *for a while*, till time should enable him to earn a competency. A much more modest one would suffice for comfort for his own quiet tastes, and he thought he knew Alice well enough to feel sure she would, like himself, be as happy on three or four hundred a-year as on double that sum.

Patience and perseverance would attain this. Meanwhile *he must do right*. But how would Alice view the question of right and wrong? Not as he did *as yet*, he felt almost sure, and *therefore* he would not trust himself or his resolution by telling her of his purpose till it was fulfilled, lest he should be drawn aside. The old prayer he had *said* from childhood, and now *prayed* intelligently, asked "Lead us not into temptation," and he dared not go into the very face of it. Alice's entreaties or tears would be hard to withstand, but once the step was taken she would only honour his acting up to his conscience, and be his stay and comforter.

On entering his father's private office, again the old oft-repeated suggestion met him. Should he bring fresh trouble on that parent's brow? The moon had only once again passed its full since the fearful night which deprived him of his eldest son. Again the thought arose, Ought he to wait a while still?

The only earthly counsellor at hand, with whom he would care to advise, was Edwin Moreton, tutor to his younger brothers, but he felt assured he would only confirm all his own convictions, and the speaking these out might lose him his post if discovered. Arnold knew not only that the salary and vicinity to his widowed mother was of great moment to the young tutor, but also felt sure that his influence was so good over his pupils, especially the invalid boy, who had been so spoilt through indulgence during ill health. Alfred, his lame brother, had never been so bright and happy under any teacher before. No, Arnold would not, for the sake of the relief of sympathy and converse on his trouble, endanger Edwin Moreton's continuance in the family; he would have it to say that no one had influenced in any way the step he was taking.

But the honest heart was to be relieved of suspense, and the way opened up to him.

"Arnold," said his father, "there's a new contract to supply the firm of C——. I was to have gone and met the second partner at the Queen's Hotel to-day, but you must go in my stead, for I want to be at home to see Holmes, who writes he is coming on his way through town. As partner,

you will do just as well, and your first official act will be a good stroke of business.

"But I am not partner yet."

"To all intent and purpose, the deed is signed on my side which makes you so. The stupid mistake of the clerk, who engrossed the parchment in inserting a wrong name, has been corrected. There it is, ready for you to add your signature."

"But, my dear father, I wanted to speak to you on this very matter. I am thankful for the mistake and delay."

"Why, what difference on earth can it make?"

"I'm sadly afraid I shall distress you, father, but I have, after much consideration, come to the conclusion that I do not wish to become a partner."

"Have you taken leave of your senses, Arnold? or are you talking in your sleep. What *do you mean?*"

"That the scruples I have at times hinted to you have become rooted convictions."

"Rooted fooleries, you mean!"

"I can only judge for myself, sir, but I feel I cannot longer subsist on what is, you know, the cause of the ruin of body and soul of thousands in this great metropolis."

"And, pray, on what *do* you intend to subsist, may I ask?"

"I thank you gratefully, father, for all your past goodness to me, and all you had promised and offered me, but I desire to go forth to earn my bread at some other branch of commerce."

"Indeed! and your marriage? Do you suppose,

if Alice is silly enough to wish it, that Mr. Warton will suffer her to live in lodgings on bread and cheese?"

"I should not ask to take her from her father's home till I can offer her a comfortable one."

"Does Alice know this new absurd freak, pray, or her father?"

"No, sir. I have spoken to no one but yourself on the matter."

"That's the only grain of sense you've shown in the matter. Perhaps the folly is not yet past remedy. What difference will it make to the world at large, or how will the consumption of spirits be affected one gill, by your not becoming a partner? answer me that; or, if the firm of Houlton were to cease to-morrow, would it lessen the amount consumed, or make one drunkard the less? You *know* it would not! The demand regulates the supply, and the existing firms would make up the deficit, or a new one arise, and not one of the establishments you so deprecate be shut up. We are not answerable for the folly of the intemperate, and have nothing to do with the way in which those places are conducted. The managers are the responsible agents; we only take care to supply a genuine article, its abuse and the evils and adulteration do not lie at our door."

"Father, I have weighed the arguments you use, and others of like nature, over and over again, but they, at least to me, sound out the warning of the writing on the wall. As I lay awake, night after night, this past month, it seemed written in liquid-fire on the whole of the arguments in favour of the

distillery, and similar trades, 'Thou are weighed in the balance and found wanting.' Pardon me, I can only speak out my own sad convictions."

"How has this sudden change come about, since you rejoiced not six weeks ago in the position the partnership gave you, and, on the strength of it, obtained Mr. Warton's consent to the fixing of your marriage-day? Has Mr. Moreton been supplementing his duties, as tutor, by teaching my sons to condemn their father's trade as not fit for his children. If so, I'll not have such saints in my house. Pretty Christianity, to make sons look down upon instead of honouring their parents." Mr. Houlton spoke rapidly and angrily.

"No, indeed, father. Edwin Moreton has never uttered a syllable on the subject in my hearing, to my knowledge. I have had passing doubts for years, you know, and the more misery I met with amongst the poor from strong drink, the greater became my uneasiness at our supplying the agent of their sorrows and ruin."

"Again, I repeat, we are not answerable for the abuse and ill use of an article. As well may you say knives should not be made, because persons are known to cut themselves with them, and because men have committed murder with them."

"If stabbing were the common use of such, I *should* say so, and were I a manufacturer of hardware, no dagger should certainly be made on my premises."

"The whole thing turns on a fallacy of yours. Neither I nor you are responsible for the misuse of an excess of spirits more than any other liquor. If

you don't value my opinion, what of some of the names of brewers and wine merchants which figure not only on all religious subscription lists, but at missionary meetings—men who take a prominent part in religious work, such as I don't profess to aim at. Have they not consciences as well as yourself?"

"Father, I've tried to lay mine to rest thus, and stifle its whispers, and have at least lulled it to sleep for a while, but when I stood by poor Hugh's lifeless form, it would not do. That silent face spoke in language not to be forgotten, 'Drink has slain me.' The arrows of death came from this very building, were manufactured beneath this roof; the houses he frequented, the one from which he was brought home a corpse, was, and is supplied by our firm. Father, I must speak out this once." Mr. Houlton had been by deprecating looks and signs trying to stop him, visibly affected, as he always was, by any allusion to his son's death.

"I lament to grieve you, father, on this sad subject, but I shall grieve more if I do not this once unburden my conscience. If *we* have been thus wounded, stabbed to the heart by the weapons of our own making, can we bear to pierce thousands of as tender hearts with the self-same instruments of destruction? *I dare not*, now my eyes are fully opened to the evil."

"I think you might have spared my feelings, Arnold, but it is on a piece with the youthful arrogance of this day that preaches to gray hairs. The very basis of your argument is wrong; once more, I repeat, the very case you adduce proves it is the abuse and not the use that underlies the whole evil.

Why is poor Hugh gone, whilst you are sitting there in health; not because the spirit was manufactured, but because one abused it and the other did not. Have you ever been injured by it, or seen myself or Robert affected by it?"

"Spirits have not passed my lips more than once or twice in my life, and never shall again, or anything of the sort, God helping me. But all are not alike. I have had better friends and companions, and a happier lot, the love of a true woman to secure me from temptation to low company, whilst poor Hugh——"

"Might have chosen as wisely. Again the same story—*misuse* of opportunities."

"The heartlessness of Anne Hall wrecked Hugh's happiness, father, and threw him into company to drown his trouble, but the liquid fire *from this distillery* killed him, and *to me* the gold made in this business is the price of blood—a brother's blood."

"I think our interview has lasted long enough, and too long, when my son brands me as a murderer. Your next self-imposed duty will be to acquaint Alice and her father with your decision, and learn the result of your infatuation. Pray, how much longer do you meditate remaining under this blood-stained roof?"

"I do not wish to leave you at any inconvenience, as to office work, till you can supply my place."

"No great difficulty there, I apprehend, but I'll leave it open for the rest of the week, as others may be more successful in their arguments to save you from ruining all your prospects in life."

Arnold went back to his desk in the next room.

His head swam, and he found it difficult to arrive at any correct calculations; the columns of figures seemed to dance before his eyes, but he felt thankful that one ordeal was passed through without faltering.

CHAPTER II.

Yet I knew

That all who follow Christ must suffer here.—*B. M.*

To understand better the resolve of Arnold Houlton and its occasion, we must go back to the morning of a bright day in May. Arnold had, since the completion of his college studies, as previously arranged, served as clerk in his father's office for three years, and had worked up from the lower step, to the upper one of all, the better to master the business. Mr. Houlton found his second son's steady application to work and clear head most valuable, compensating to him for the hopelessness of ever making a man of business habits of his eldest, who only seemed to understand how to spend what his father made; wasting time and wealth on most undesirable pleasures and company. The experience of a couple of years' travelling had only resulted in a large outlay of money, bringing back Hugh Houlton not a whit improved. His absence was more welcome than his presence at home, and the irregularity of his habits so well known, that his non-appearance created neither surprise nor anxiety in the family circle.

But on this particular May morning Mrs. Houlton was nervous and worried, having passed an uneasy night, troubled with painful dreams about her eldest son. Her husband vainly tried to comfort her with the notion, in which he had no faith himself, that when Hugh had sown his wild oats he would settle down all right; but finding his wife really unhappy and seriously depressed, he told Arnold he had better remain at home to cheer up his mother, instead of accompanying him, as usual, to town.

"Take her for a drive after breakfast to your new house, and get her to give her advice about the fittings of the conservatory, and you can call for Alice; she wanted to have your mother's opinion about the paper for the drawing-room. I shall give orders for the carriage to come round at ten o'clock."

But ere that hour arrived, a summons had come for Arnold from the inn of the next village, where, it appeared, his brother Hugh had passed the night. Leaving word at home that he might not be able to go till after luncheon, he made the best of his way to the country inn, where he found the doctor already awaiting him—not, however, to render assistance, but to tell the living brother of the dead one's end.

Hugh Houlton had driven thus far home from one of his friend's houses, and had gone in for a dram. Meeting with an acquaintance of the farmer-class, he ordered in supplies to the private parlour, and remained till he was incapable of driving him-

self, and refused to leave the house at the hour of closing. He was ultimately led upstairs to the best guest-chamber, and insisted on having spirits brought up there, which were found to have been consumed during the night. That he should sleep heavily, and not be disposed for early rising, was no matter of surprise. A person in the next room heard several times what was supposed to be the snoring of the intoxicated man; whether it were groaning instead, must remain unknown. The landlord, thinking his guest might probably require a soda-water breakfast, knocked several times, and at last resolved to open the door and inquire if he could serve his guest.

The sight that met his view on going to the bedside induced him to send off in two directions—for the doctor and for Mr. Houlton, senior. That gentleman having already started for town, the son obeyed the summons. The doctor had, on arriving, pronounced the fit to have ended in death some hours previously. The cause assigned, apoplexy, the result of drinking. When Arnold upbraided the landlord with supplying spirits to a man in his brother's condition, as he gathered it from other witnesses in the inn, the biting retort came—

"I supplied the gentleman with nothing but the very best 'Houlton's own finest spirits!'"

The father came back, summoned by telegram as he stepped out of the train; a coroner's inquest was averted. How the tidings was broken to the mother Arnold never knew, but a silent embrace,

weeping in each other's arms, was all that mother and son felt capable of. Neither could frame the name of the lost one. Once before that form should be hid for ever from sight, Arnold felt he must enter that chamber where he had so often sat, and which had in early days been shared by the brothers. A shudder passed over his spirit; the angels of light, who had guarded their childhood, keeping watch over their heads as they laid side by side folded in each other's arms, had departed; their ministry was over; the spirits of darkness had long been beguiling their victim.

That manly form, with its handsome features, the flower of the flock in beauty laid low; the lips sealed for ever, the secrets of that last night, never to be told this side the grave; had there been consciousness of coming peril or death? had any cry reached an Almighty ear, though unheard by mortal one? As Arnold stood beside that form, what thronging memories came back, what vain regrets; their different habits had divided them of late so much. Had he done all he might have done to strive and win him from his fatal snare? Had he not been so much engrossed with his own happier lot, might he not have devoted himself more earnestly to the task of rescuing that brother's life from ruin? The past was beyond his recall, but what of the future? How well he remembered the bright-eyed boy carrying out from his father's hand the glass of neat spirits to the coachman after a cold or wet drive to the front door; and hearing him inquire, "Does not that stuff burn you, Jones?"

The drops that went on my fingers in carrying it down the steps, set my lips on fire."

"No, Master Hugh, it goes down warm and comfortable, keeps the cold out," replied the man, who learnt thus first to drink raw spirits; though it was all forgotten in what school he learnt his lesson, when two or three narrow escapes in driving home from parties, was followed by another occasion when he drove into a pond, and the ladies in the carriage were with difficulty rescued from drowning. Next day the man received his dismissal, and he and his family were brought down to want and sore straits owing to his being unable to obtain a situation, as the master who had been his first tempter refused to give such a drunken rascal a character. At last he was led in God's good providence to apply for a place, where, when kindly questioned, he confessed the cause of his distress, and was granted a trial by the Christian master on condition the snare was for ever abandoned, which pledge he faithfully kept, together with his situation, as an honoured, valued servant, for long years. Arnold had recently met with him and heard his history from his own lips, and now recalled it in that sad chamber. And then arose another picture before his mind's eye of that dead brother, in early boyhood, having, together with himself, a sip out of his father's tumbler of hot toddy, and next a wine-glass of the same given as a treat to each, but refused after the first trial by himself as not to his taste, and producing, happily in his case, a headache. Not so, alas, with poor

Hugh, who would complain if his father lowered his portion, and was laughed at as "too good a judge," and "quite a young toper." These were some of the first downward steps taken in early youth towards the pit of destruction, led to its borders by a parent's hand. Nothing that could intoxicate had passed Arnold's lips since that fatal morning. Now he vowed by that solemn presence it never should; and how could he consent to live by what had slain that loved playmate of his childhood. Must he not rather wage war against the foe that had lain him low?

In that sad chamber of death he knelt and asked grace, first, to see his path of duty clear, and then strength to tread it at any cost, let the road be ever so sharp, the ascent ever so steep and hard to gain. Then regaining his own room he opened his Bible, a gift from a college friend, whose companionship had been gradually making him dissatisfied with the respectable amount of religion he had grown up with in his own home. During that friend's stay, the previous autumn, many a conversation on the deep things of God had been held in that room at night, Nicodemus-like, till he had discovered he was sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. That was a first step gained; it was the emerging out of the thick darkness, for when that is complete, there can be no shadow seen; there must be light before there can be a shadow. And so it was with Arnold Houlton; it was the dawning, but he was looking towards the sun-rising, and the healing rays were already rising upon his soul, though he was yet

a long way off noon-day clearness. This pocket reference Bible, with many a lined passage and note in the margin, had been a legacy of that last autumn visit, and now Arnold opened it as he leant his weary head upon his hands. He was very weary and worn with heart-ache. It had been needful that Mr. Houlton or his son should go up to the house of business, though not accessible to any but their own people, that week, and Arnold had been thankful to be sent up, instead of remaining the long days with the sad, silent mother, who seemed to be crushed with her unspoken grief. But the strain of work by day, and wakeful nights of sorrow, told on even one in the full vigour of youth, and the weary eyes were closed not in sleep, but in thought and prayer; when they opened they fell on the passage—"Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days, so shall thy strength be."

Arnold took it as an answer and promise for himself, and no doubt crossed his mind that the way would be made clear. The struggle was not a short one, the conflict was sharp and prolonged. But He who had *suffered*, being tempted, was with the tried young disciple, and when the temptation was ended for a season, came as the Comforter, and spoke peace to him, nerving him to give forth his battle cry, as we have already seen, with no uncertain sound. That same gracious Presence would not leave nor forsake the young soldier in a yet more trying encounter with the enemy, now about to try his final and hardest throw on this battle-ground.

CHAPTER III.

His secret cords will guide our faltering steps,
By the right way up to the city gate.—*B. M.*

ALICE WARTON'S home was within half-an-hour's walk from Mr. Houlton's country residence, Downton Park, but she had been absent two or three weeks, and would not return for another day or two; perhaps ere then he might have possibly heard of some opening, and have thus taken his line definitely. It was of no use to go over to Thornhill Grange at present. To his astonishment, Arnold, however, received in the course of the day following the interview with his father a letter from Mr. Warton, informing him he had learnt his strange decision from Mr. Houlton, and that this, unless retracted, would end all connection between himself and his daughter, as he had consented to her union with one able and willing to give her a home and position, such as she had been accustomed to, but could not permit any engagement to continue under present circumstances. Indeed, it was evident, he said, that Arnold's professed attachment to her was of a very unstable character, and, like his opinions, liable to change, or he would not voluntarily have placed himself in a position rendering him incapable of fulfilling his part of the contract, as his present schemes would hardly secure his own livelihood.

Arnold's entreaty for at least one interview to

explain his painful situation to both Alice and her father was refused, unless he was prepared to take wiser counsels and resume the position under which he had won his daughter's affections. But even to gain the precious boon of a last opportunity of pleading his cause, Arnold could not affect any willingness to retreat from the position he had taken up, and received, accordingly, his final dismissal from Mr. Warton, together with a parcel containing the trinkets he had bestowed on Alice, even to the ring of betrothal, and demanding a similar return of hers to himself in exchange. These Arnold declared his readiness to yield up, if first assured in writing by Alice herself that it was *her* desire, without which he declined to return them. This mandate did not reach him, but her father professed that she was so justly displeased with his not having taken her into counsel before resolving on a step affecting her future prospects as well as his own, that her trust in his judgment, also, was so shaken, that she would soon feel she had a happy escape from one who could not make her a sharer in his most important confidences.

The closing evening of this eventful week, Arnold learnt that his desk would be filled on the following Monday by Alice Warton's brother, who was troubled with no scruples, and hailed gladly an opening which might and probably would eventually lead to entering the firm at some future period. Arnold almost wished himself already gone from the old home-roof, his father's manner was so sternly grave and distant, and his mother's look so pitiful. He still had the talk with her hanging over his head, and she had been so

broken-hearted at his brother's death, her first-born, and he had so hoped to comfort her, and now, instead, he was only adding another sorrow to her cup of grief. His next brother, Robert, was at present in a friend's house of business, but would, after a while, return to his father's, and take the place in the firm vacated by his two elder brothers.

It was scarcely probable that any situation would offer which would allow him still to remain under the old roof, and, indeed, his father had not given any intimation of a desire that it should be so; rather had he remarked "that he wondered the bread he was eating did not stick in his throat, bought with the accursed gold."

But the Sabbath brought at least a season of rest and quiet, and the converse held on that day with his mother had no element of bitterness in it; she had no word of reproach for him; she felt for his sorrow, and loved him with a tender affection and a higher esteem for his sacrifices to the voice of conscience. In her heart of hearts she went with him, but could not praise the son without blaming the husband, both so dear to her faithful heart. Many had been the clouds over her married home; it did sometimes seem almost as though no blessing came with the gold that provided luxuries, but could not stay the destroyer's hand, the angel of death, nor avert sickness or sorrow. She thought, at times, or fancied, there was a look of reproach in the eyes of some of those poor wives and mothers whose homes were wrecked by drink, and yet her hand was ever open to relieve distress, and her heart to give loving words and sympathy. Mrs.

Houlton would have had her suspicions confirmed had she overheard the remarks that circulated freely in the village after the sad catastrophe.

"It will come home to herself now; she'll know what we curse the drink for now."

"Well, I don't suppose she can help it; the blame lies at *his* door, she's a kind lady."

"I don't deny that, nor that he is free with his money to the poor, but all that fine house and the grand carriages and horses are paid for by that drink that ruins our homes."

"And who made my poor boy what he has become," said an old woman, who sat knitting at her door, as the other stood talking in front of her gate. "Why, my Tom never touched spirits, couldn't bear the sight of them, till he went to be keeper at the great house, and had it dealt out to him when the quality folk went out shooting. He'd sooner have had cold tea then, and said it burnt his inside and made his head queer, but he grew used to it, till he got a craving that couldn't be satisfied without dropping down to the 'public' of an evening after he came home; and when I begged on him to keep away, he said he *must* have it, and soon came back later and later, and worse and worse, till I was almost frightened at him. Then, when I talked to him next morning of the danger of drinking the vile public-house stuff, and how he'd lose his berth, he'd say that the stuff sold there came out of the same house, and had the master's name on it. Then he got dismissed; the master would have no drunken servants, though he had made him one, and now he has got teetotalers in two of his places. If

he finds them best for his work, why does he make the stuff that turns men into drunkards? And now, my Tom, having lost his character, is gone from bad to worse, and if he be a poacher, as some say, who turned an honest, sober lad into one?"

"A true word you speak, missus," said another, who had stopped to join the group, "and if this village street has more wild drinking lads than another, who has led them into the evil? Why, the master's own son became a drunkard himself, and was killed at last by the very stuff his father lives by and grows rich upon."

Though Mrs. Houlton had never heard this village talk, not a little of its echo had reached Arnold's ears of late, and helped to confirm his convictions. He had not the strikingly handsome appearance of his elder brother, and, though above middle height, had not the commanding figure which combined grace and strength in every limb, nor did he possess the almost faultless beauty of feature of poor Hugh. But Arnold's countenance was one you retained pleasantly in your recollection; the thoughtful gray eye inspired confidence, as did also the firm mouth, which combined power with sweetness. That last Sabbath in his childhood's home, Arnold Houlton strove to comfort, and not add anguish by betraying his own to the tender mother so dear to him. The backbone in his character he had not inherited from her, though the gentle qualities had flowed from her veins. His father's and his own disposition were more akin in the resolute purpose and determined adhesion to a course once adopted.

That night his lamp burnt long ere he went to bed, and when he closed his eyes, it was to stay his soul on the example of the Master, as recorded by St. Luke ix. 51, who, "when the time was come that He should be received up, He *steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.*" The divine Master was cast out, where He fain would have lodged, because of this. Could the servant treading humbly a long way off the path of trial expect a better reception? If his resolve to act up to the voice of conscience was to make him a wanderer from home and friends, still he should hardly fare so ill as his Lord, who had not where to lay His head.

Plants have been known in high temperature to grow rapidly in one hot night, so, in the heated atmosphere of furnace trial, had Arnold Houlton's soul attained a measure of faith and trust, in this short week, far beyond all its previous growth.

Come what might, the solemn words of the Master's should not be forgotten or disregarded by him: "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." No, rather "forgetting those things which are behind," in as far as they could weaken or shake his resolve, and "reaching forth unto those things which are before," he would, by God's grace, "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

CHAPTER IV.

Our plans may be disjoined,
But we may calmly rest ;
What God has once appointed,
Is better than our best.—*F. R. H.*

THE early breakfast usually shared in by Mr. Houlton and his son Arnold, alone—for owing to the mother's delicacy she did not rise for it—was that next Monday morning a constrained meal, and the arrival of the letter bag was a welcome diversion, occupying both to the exclusion of conversation.

Mr. Houlton rose to go to his study before leaving for town.

"Father, can you spare me a few minutes. I have a letter from Hubert Randolph, who was here last autumn, asking me to meet him in town, and go down with him to Beechwood, where he is to spend a few weeks, having over-worked himself lately. I think I cannot do better than accept the invitation, as he believes that in the north I may find occupation."

"It is to be hoped he may prove right," rejoined Mr. Houlton, as Arnold paused for a moment.

"As I shall have to leave this evening before your return, to keep his appointment, I wish to say, before we part, how truly sorry I am to have displeased and grieved you, and to ask you, father, to add to all the kindness of a lifetime by believing that nothing but the irresistible dictates of conscience could have ena-

bled me to take this painful step. And if, in word or tone, in the strength of my convictions, I erred by any lack of respect to one of the kindest of parents, you will forgive me, and let us part as we have so long lived, in peace and love."

"Arnold," the father's voice struggled with suppressed emotion, "Arnold, I do, I will believe it. Much as I must regret what I deem, from my own standpoint, a morbid, mistaken step, which ruins your own prospects, and deprives me of my right hand, I give you credit for acting now, as you have ever done, under a sense of duty. Perhaps we both used strong language in our warmth the other day, and if I said anything to cast a shadow on your dutiful conduct as a son, which has never yet failed towards myself or your mother, forget it, and consider it unsaid. I know not how to further your wishes save by introduction to one or two in the mercantile line, as my interest lies in one channel, and your scruples render unavailable any means drawn from the same source. Your mother's fortune was, as perhaps you know, never invested in our business, owing to some similar prejudices on the part of her father, or, instead of being in the three per cents., it might have been trebled by this time. She has always had the sole use of the income derived from it, and spends it, I know, unselfishly on other's needs. She will be able to prevent your going out from here with an empty pocket, so that you need not be hurried into any sudden step as to your future calling.

"Personally, and for her sake, I could have desired you should find employment nearer home, but, on the

other hand, she feels—and she is right—that this vicinity would not be advisable for you or Alice under existing circumstances; but that you will be ever welcome under your father's roof, when you feel it well to come here, I hope you will never for a moment doubt."

The servant coming in to announce that the dog-cart was at the door to convey his master to the station, the father and son parted affectionately, each going happier to the day's work for the restored understanding, which had never till the past week been interrupted between them. As Arnold watched the receding form, and waved an adieu from the doorstep, his heart glowed with thankfulness for the heavenly Father's gracious loving-kindness in breaking down the barrier that had seemed to have risen up between his father and himself.

Arnold Houlton was one who had kept the Fifth Commandment, and its promise was his own, and if, in taking up his cross, he must go out into a cold world, the blessing of father and mother lay warm at his heart, and strengthened his steps along a stony road.

He travelled down to Beechwood Park, the beautiful residence of his friend's father, and the time passed quickly and pleasantly in Hubert Randolph's society and that of his family circle, but no desirable opening as yet had presented itself.

"I saw some lodgings yesterday which will serve my purpose, and on the spot I may be more likely to hear of something," remarked Arnold to his friend.

"Nonsense, old fellow, you're not going off yet to that smoky atmosphere, I can tell you."

"I feel I have already trespassed on your father's hospitality, turning a visit into a visitation of nearly a month, Hubert."

"Three weeks yesterday, Arnold, you and I came down from town, and I'm going to take another week or two to recruit before I go back to London, and shan't let you off any sooner, unless any eligible opening occurs for you before."

"That does not seem very likely to present itself from all I can hear of the disproportion between applicants and vacancies, so I intend, meanwhile, to turn my hand to copying law-papers. Your father mentioned a solicitor who was ready to supply some considerable amount of such work for a short time."

"Old Foxy, as we dub him, I suppose," inquired Hubert.

"Mr. Randolph told me last evening that he had heard of nothing save a vacancy as a lawyer's clerk, but on learning that I had never been in any but a mercantile office, Mr. Foxley said I should not do for him. His partner, however, remarked that if I wrote a clear hand there was plenty of copying, even if I could not engross, as they were smothered in work just now owing to some business connected with the city and corporation. Your father said he could not answer for my powers of penmanship, as he did not recall having seen my handwriting, but he would mention it to me, and if I wished for the work I could write for it, and I have done so, as I am not afraid of rejection on the score of illegibility."

"It is well it was not your humble servant, whose hieroglyphics would hardly have suited Old Foxy, or

even his more amenable partner, Tomkins, but you can do the copying out here, as well as in the smoke of Birmingham, if you won't be idle any longer to keep me company."

"Thank you, Hubert, but I've intruded already too long on your father as a guest, and I'm sure he felt it was my duty to accept the employment at once, till something better turns up, and I told him I would write at once to obtain it, and secure my lodgings."

"What nonsense to talk of *intruding* and *trespassing* and the rest of it. My father is always glad to receive any of my friends. You don't understand him; his manner is reserved, and some may think it cold, but it covers as warm a heart as ever beat."

"I have no reason to doubt it, Hubert. I'm sure I'm much indebted for his courtesy to myself, a perfect stranger, without any claim on his hospitality."

"What's come to you, Arnold; *indebted* and no *claim*, stuff and nonsense. Why, my father considers his son's friends as his own, and have not I been your father's guest more than once? Come, I didn't think you were too proud to accept a return. Something has riled you; out with it, and you'll feel better for the relief."

"I suppose it is pride at the bottom of the sore. I had rather a strong dose to swallow yesterday at both the houses I visited. I've been so used to home all my life, and met with such good treatment here, that I had to learn the lesson that the son of the rich owner at Downton, and belonging to the firm of Houlton, was one person, and that Arnold

Houlton, seeking to earn his own livelihood, was quite another, when disrobed of his money and position.

"I called on two of my father's friends, or acquaintances, I think, I had better call them now, as 'a friend should show himself friendly' to a friend's son. It was in consequence of a suggestion in my father's letter I did so. Both these great men, in their own eyes, had been his guests, and their sons also, time after time, hunting with my poor brother on my father's horses. I was received in both cases with open arms, pressed to accept invitations to fetes, &c., till, having opened the purpose of my visit, introductions to some sphere of employment in Birmingham, a change came over countenance and tone: 'Very sorry, but no chance of helping me thus' and, with supercilious pity for my 'unfortunate scruples,' advised me to return South and try London instead, and not waste time or inquiries in Birmingham.

"The one who had pressed me to join a coming picnic, forgetting this, regretted that as they should be going away shortly for some time, he should probably not see me again before my return. Neither of these men need fear, if I live fifty years in Birmingham, my ever crossing their path again," said Arnold, somewhat bitterly.

"Contemptible fellows, not worth your vexing yourself over, or giving a second thought to, regular Brummagen ware."

"You are right, Hubert, they are not worth it, but I'm foolish enough to feel stupid and blue to-day. The thoughts will keep intruding themselves what this day might have been."

"My dear fellow," said Hubert Randolph, rising from his seat, and coming into the bay window out of which his friend was leaning forward, partly to catch the cool breeze on his heated brow, and also to conceal the quivering of the muscles of his face, "I had entirely forgotten this was to have been *the* day," laying his hand on Arnold's shoulder as he stood behind him. "It's only a postponement, I feel sure. I shall hold myself for the office I know I shall fill still, only be best man, take higher rank, as your brother Robert will be incapacitated by his marriage before that."

"More likely I shall be yours, Hubert; it must be many a long year ere the poor clerk gets enough to keep a wife in the humblest style, and Mr. Warton declares he'll not give a daughter of his to any one who can't settle down an equivalent to her dower, and that means 'never to me.'"

"Never is a long time, Arnold. The course of true love never runs smooth, so says the adage, and that only confirms the genuineness of the article in your case. If you keep me waiting *too long*, why, then, all the worse for you, for you'll have to ask my wife, as well as myself, to the wedding, though she is mythical as yet. Cheer up, old boy. If I have any insight into character, which I rather flatter myself I have, your Alice has a will of her own, and will keep her hand and heart intact for you till you are ready for her. I see it all in the blue distance, the *then* distinguished barrister, as bridegroom's chief friend, and——. But my dear Arnold, in grave earnest, you will yet prove the truth of the promise of the

divine Master—"There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sister, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My sake, and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred-fold now in this time; houses, and brethren, and sisters, and lands, with persecution, and in the world to come, eternal life.' You have, at His word, given up all, and you will find fulfilled that other Old Testament covenant—"No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly,' and among your good things, I shall see you blest with a good wife, one day, and that good gift, Alice Warton, I firmly believe."

"You'll never see me with any other. She's been my dream from boyhood; every vision of life has been with her, by my side."

"And there she will be one day yet, in God's own time, when He has wrought His own work in her, as He has done in you, and made her a true helpmeet in the highest sense of the word. This dark cloud which is perfecting your faith will draw her in closer beneath the same sure refuge. She was already on the road, it seemed to me, when I saw her last autumn."

"I think she was in front of me, certainly, before poor Hugh's awful end made the scales fall from my eyes."

The door opened, and a sylph-like form came in with springing footstep. Hubert Randolph caught his little sister as she was passing him. "What do you mean by treating your learned brother so unceremoniously?"

"Let me go, Hubert; I've a message for Mr. Houlton."

Arnold turned round and put out his hand to her outstretched one. "Hubert, you must release my Gazelle."

"Not until she has paid the penalty."

"Oh, your horrid beard does scrub so! I can't bear you in it!" exclaimed the impetuous little fairy, as she made good her escape, landing herself in Arnold's arms, with whom she had become a great favourite during his visit.

"Well, Gazelle, I'm all attention for my message; who is it from?"

"Mamma; at least mamma says I may go with the party on the lake in the boat if you are going and will take care of me."

"It's quite time you decamped, Arnold. I see I'm already supplanted. My lady mother coolly passes over her first-born trusty son, ignoring his powers of care-taking, and confides her precious jewel to your charge, and the little minx struggles out of my grasp as out of prison bars to esconce herself on your knee. I shall get eaten up of the green-eyed monster if you're here much longer," and Hubert Randolph affected an aggrieved air and tone.

"He doesn't mean it, Mr. Houlton; he never means what he says, said the merry child."

"A serious charge, Gazelle," remarked Arnold smiling.

"A downright libel. Are you not afraid of defaming a member of the learned profession, you little monkey? For which heinous crime you'll have to pay another fine."

"Tell him he has been guilty of a worse libel in styling my bright-eyed Gazelle a little monkey," whispered Arnold in audible tones.

"Come, I'm going to put you through a severe cross-examination," said Hubert, drawing a chair in front of his little sister.

"Do you mean to say that my lady mother proposed that Arnold should have the plague of keeping you out of mischief on the lake?"

"Mamma said I could not go unless some one would look after me."

"Ah, now we are coming to the point. And did she suggest Mr. Arnold Houlton or not, eh, puss?"

"I said you would be in the boat, but mamma said that would be no good."

"Upon my word things have come to a pitch. I think, Arnold, you had better go off by next train. 'I was no good;' go on, young monkey."

Sybil was laughing too much to obey, but at last continued: "I never said you was no good."

"If you did, it was bad grammar."

"Mamma said you would be steersman, and so would be no good to look after me, as you'd have something more important to attend to; so I said, 'I was sure you,' looking up into Arnold's face, 'would keep me safe.'"

"Would find it a pleasure to fill the responsible post of keeper to an electric eel, was that how you put it, eh?" asked her brother, as he caught hold of one of her long tresses.

"No, Hubert, I did not use such long words. Mamma said Mr. Houlton might not like the

trouble, so I said I would go and ask him, and you will take me, now, won't you?"

"Yes, with the greatest pleasure, Gazelle; how soon must I be ready?"

"Almost directly; we are to have luncheon dinner on the island; won't it be nice?" said the happy child.

"Very well, the steersman is pacified, and won't send off your keeper till next time he excites a fit of jealousy."

There was no more time for sad reflections, and Hubert Randolph's satisfaction was extreme at the prospect of the picnic absorbing his friend's time and attention so fully with the charge of his little favourite on this trying day.

CHAPTER V.

A peace above all earthly dignities—
A still and quiet conscience.—*Shakspeare.*

THE excursion on the lake was a success in more ways than one. Among the company was a friend of Mr. Randolph, who, on his arrival, apologised for the absence of his brother-in-law, Mr. Monson. "He was so disappointed, and I was so sorry he could not come, for he looks fagged, and a day on the lake would have done him a world of good; but he has failed in obtaining anyone to fill my nephew's place, whose accident has laid him up,

so that I fear he is not likely to resume his place in the office for many weeks, or even months."

In the course of the afternoon Mr. Randolph mentioned that Arnold Houlton was seeking similar employment, adding, "I have only known him for three weeks personally, but he is one of Hubert's chosen friends, made at college five years ago, and I must say, all I have seen of the young man has convinced me he is worthy of the warm place he holds in my son's esteem.

"To be one of my godson Hubert's chosen few is sufficient certificate of character for me, or my brother-in-law, but will he accept a temporary post; the salary would be good, for the position in the head office is a responsible one. Monson has tried having one of the head clerks up, but it only disarranged the other departments, and won't do."

A short conversation between the two parties convinced the elder gentleman that Arnold's experience was just what would enable him to be an efficient substitute for the invalided partner, and he arranged that Arnold should enter on his new duties the following day, going up by first train to Birmingham. Sybil's good night was a tearful one, having learned that her friend would have left before the usual breakfast hour next morning. Arnold thanked his host gratefully for his hospitality, and for obtaining him a berth for the present, which might, he felt, lead to some more permanent one through the business connections of his future employer. Mr. Randolph was even cordial in his parting interview, assuring his son's friend that he would be a welcome guest at any

time on his own account, as he had been on his son's before.

Next day, Arnold, leaving his luggage at the lodgings, took his cab on to the merchant's office, fearing to be behind his time of appointment, owing to the lateness of the morning train, and found Mr. Wilton, his acquaintance of the previous day, already at his brother-in-law's office, kindly awaiting Arnold's arrival to introduce him to his future chief, which, after a friendly greeting and cordial shake of the hand, he proceeded to do. Mr. Monson rose from his seat, advanced a step, and bowed rather stiffly to his new clerk, who felt as if a sudden chill blast had been let in upon him.

In writing to his friend, Hubert Randolph, a few days later, he said—"I was almost committing a *faux pas*, for the very pleasant salutation and hearty grasp of your father's friend had put me off my guard, and I was very nearly forgetting how to act my new rôle of clerk, having so long been more or less in a master's position in my father's counting-house; and the next moment should have put out my hand, but fortunately I did not—something in the merchant's face kept me at my proper distance. Mr. Monson does not shake hands with any save his old chief clerk, and only on special occasions; and, of course, when I came to remember, my father did not go through that performance with any of his subs, as a rule, though I think it was a regulation more often honoured in the breach than the observance. I shall come down to my right level soon; it is early days to go easy in tight new shoes, especially with tender feet. But I already have

a sincere respect for my chief, and believe his business is conducted on the highest principles. Indeed, ere I left the office that first day, I knew I was under the roof of a servant of God. After Mr. Wilton left the room, I was initiated into my new duties, which are really very similar to my old work at home, though in a different branch of commerce, as I am temporary substitute for the son and junior partner. But before I took my place at the vacant desk, Mr. Monson said he was in the habit of commending those who came into his establishment, to the Lord in prayer before they entered on their work. He looked hard at me as he said it, as if he would read my notions on the matter. I signified my ready acquiescence in his custom, and when we rose from our knees felt I had a Christian master to serve, who kept in view the All-seeing eye himself, and desired those under him should do the same. We have got on very comfortably at present. It takes a little while, doubtless, to get into most employers' ways, but I begin to understand mine. The second day I gained a clue. I had answered a letter for a large order, and took it to him with other papers for signature. He objected to the wording, I having in the usual style of our form promised 'it should be attended to with all possible despatch.' He required the letter to be re-written, 'the order should be sent off in due course,' to be substituted; 'loud profession generally meant low practice,' he said, in his experience of business.

About nine weeks after Arnold had first entered on his duties, the invalided partner still using a crutch came into the office, but Mr. Monson informed his

assistant that his son, Mr. Brownlow, would not resume his post for another three weeks, which observation Arnold took to mean that he would have to look out for a new berth at the expiration of that period. Having seldom entered any of the other office-rooms, of which there were many belonging to the different departments of the immense concern, Arnold had made no real acquaintance, save with the chief clerk who had introduced him the first day to an eating-house near at hand, where dinner could be had good and reasonable. Being all day in the merchant's own private office, he had been isolated from the rest of the establishment, who generally quitted the premises before he left them. The gray-headed clerk, Grey by name as well as by nature, advised him in which paper to advertise and look for vacancies, and he received a few replies, but only two were in lines of business he could approve. One of these sounded well with a good salary as an upper clerk. The other was a second's place at lower remuneration. Arnold purposed at the dinner-hour consulting his usual companion, but Mr. Monson, in the course of the morning, asked if he had any employment in prospect. Arnold named the two clerkships, and his desire to know if the firm of C—— stood well in the commercial world.

"It is one with which I have no dealings," Mr. Houlton. "An advertising firm professing to do business below fair prices, and I should never be surprised at its stopping payment, and leaving its employés with unpaid salaries; but this is, of course, in strict confidence, only I feel it due to one who

has done his duty thoroughly by me during the last three months."

It was the first and only expression of satisfaction to which the merchant had given utterance, but Arnold was glad to hear it. Better late than never! as his last week was drawing to its close. Arnold thanked him for the warning, and expressed his determination to decline the offered upper-clerkship, and close instead with the junior one, as he knew Mr. Monson had frequent correspondence with that house of business, and he supposed it was a respectable one to enter. Mr. Monson assented.

At the dinner-hour Arnold announced his resolve, and was confirmed in the rejection of the more tempting bait by the head-clerk's strong censures on that firm. "But," added Mr. Grey, "if you are really going to descend the ladder so far, Mr. Houlton, there is a vacant desk in my office not filled to my knowledge yet, though there have been several applicants for it; the late occupier of it has gone this week to an uncle's banking establishment."

"Probably Mr. Monson has some one in his eye already, if not actually promised; as he never dropped any hint of a vacancy to me," replied Arnold.

"Of course, it *may* be so, but, as a rule, he always does me the favour to consult me about the occupiers of the desks in my own department."

That evening, when about to leave the office, the merchant asked Arnold if he had closed with the other offer.

"I have written the letter, sir, but it is not yet posted."

"Mr. Grey has intimated that he believes you would not object to fill the vacancy in his office. I had supposed it was too low a position and salary to be acceptable to you."

"The remuneration, sir, is, I believe, slightly in advance of the one I was about to close with, the position cannot be a matter of choice with me in the difficulty of obtaining situations at the present time, and I would rather hold it under you than one seemingly a trifle higher up the scale in a strange firm." Thus the matter was settled.

Shortly after, Hubert Randolph, on his way home for a visit, spent one night with his friend to have a long chat, and, in talking over his late decision Arnold remarked, "There were several reasons that induced me to accept the junior's desk. I should have been at a most inconvenient distance from the other place of business; it would have been almost necessary to have changed my quarters before winter set in."

"A contented mind is a continual feast. I think, Arnold, I should not have been sorry to have had so good a reason for changing such lodgings; the other side of the town is as cheery again. I saw some rooms where I was calling on a client, that made me wish you had some in the same terrace, and such a trim waiting-maid to answer the bell."

"I can't say as much for the untidy damsel here, but as her mistress wears curl papers till late in the afternoon, I suppose she has not a fair copy to go by; and as I am out from early morn till near six,

my feelings are not much wounded and my pride saved, as I have no callers to pass their remarks on my fair lacquey."

"Is the cooking decent? for this spread for me has not come from a lodging-house kitchen, I can see with half an eye."

"There, again, I'm pretty well independent of the landlady's inferior cuisine, as I always dine at a restaurant, and with college experiences can boil my own eggs, and manage a few other little matters for breakfast and tea. The rooms are kept clean and the linen white, sweet, and aired beyond what I should have expected in this smoky atmosphere."

"Well, you've made out a good case, as most folks can for their own side, as I see in my line of work daily, but you spoke of several reasons, and the clean linen as yet is all I've arrived at," said Hubert Randolph.

"The better and weightier are yet to come. You've learned ere now not to waste all your powder in the first volley, but to reserve the heavier ammunition for last?"

"Yes, I'm up to a thing or two in that line; how to turn the flank of the foe, just when he thinks the whole force of the attack is over. Now then for your final charge, old fellow."

"I said just now I have no callers in the daytime, but you may remember perhaps that I wrote you word that a week or so after I came here, one night when the table was covered with law papers I had engaged to copy, the vicar of this parish was ushered in. It seems he had been asked by Mr.

Monson to look me up. He remarked that he should have thought I had writing enough in the daylight, to which I replied that I was glad to have my evening hours filled, as I found them lonely after a home circle. Mr. Fisher responded that he could find me work as absorbing in his parish, and before leaving exacted a promise from me to come and spend the next evening at his house, which was the precursor of many more. I soon became one of his Sunday-school teachers, and most evenings have occupation provided for me at night school or factory classes. Indeed, I'm truant to-night, but obtained leave of absence in consequence of your promised visit. Now, you see, a removal to your more enchanting terrace would have taken me out of his parish altogether, and though I might have still continued my work under him, it would have entailed much fatigue and loss of time, so that I considered the advantages in the balance all lay on the side of my taking the subaltern's place in the ranks in my old corps. Of course it is a change not particularly pleasant. The chief of that department excepted, I am a comparative stranger to the rest of the clerks, and not one in that room has been to college or moved in the same social circle as myself. I daresay I am too fastidious, but there seems less refinement in the north than amongst the same grades in my southern experiences."

"Perhaps so, Arnold, but it may be more true metal though less gilded."

"I daresay you're right. It's the old foe anyhow

to grapple with; the slowness in learning the lesson to be more conformed to the image of Him who made Himself of *no reputation*, and took upon Him the form of a servant. How little can we realise what it must have been to that divine, heavenly-minded Man to mix among the common herd of sinners day by day—to that pure, exalted mind, to whom the finest spirits on earth must have been gross with human corruption? What wondrous condescending love! It transcends our highest thought!”

“Truly it does, Arnold. And the value, how great to us in our daily walk—the knowledge that in *all points* He was tempted (or tried) like as we are, and, having *suffered* being tempted, is able to succour them that are tempted. Perhaps one compensation in your present position will be that you may have an opportunity of influence amongst the younger clerks in your department.”

“The thought *has* crossed my mind, Hubert, that perhaps the Master sent me down for some task there. The work the vicar provides me with is a real pleasure, and gives me so many interests that I feel the thanks he bestows are quite out of place. I am the obliged party; but you know I never have found it easy to unbend to young men of my own age; you have been the happy exception, and that, thanks, only to your drawing me out with so much painstaking.”

“All objects really worth obtaining cost trouble. You were no exception, old fellow, to the rule, but have fully repaid my arduous labour.”

“I think I see your drift. I must put my shoulder to the wheel if I’m to be of any use where I am amidst those young fellows.”

"*Come out of your shell*, Arnold, is nearer the mark. Indolence is not your infirmity. I expect your superior, gentlemanly, but reserved tone makes you rather unapproachable to those somewhat beneath you."

"The old story. I expect I must put my pride and fastidiousness into my pocket if I'm to do any true service for the Master who was so lowly in heart. One can't read the record of His blessed life and fancy any one being afraid of coming to Him. That little child, when He took him up and set him in the midst as an object-lesson to His disciples, felt no shrinking fear, I'll be bound, or if he did momentarily, one look into the blessed face and the first tone of that gentle voice would set all doubts to rest. But it's so much easier, I find, to teach and talk about Him than to grow in His likeness. That, however, is the secret of all true success."

"You are right, indeed, Arnold, and that is what we are each put to our several classes in the Master's school to learn till our crooked letters take the shape of the Divine copy, and we become living epistles, known and read of all men."

CHAPTER VI

In little things of common life
There lies the Christian's noblest strife.—*Monseil*.

THE foregoing conversation bore fruit in a resolute purpose on Arnold Houlton's part to watch for any opening to become on a more friendly footing with

his companions, and the opportunity had not to be long waited for. A lad of eighteen filled the lowest desk, a new comer, to whose lot it fell as junior to go errands on that flat, and to pull the cord that opened the spring of the door on that stage when the bell sounded. He was an orphan son of a clergyman, and had been taken on the earnest request of a customer of Mr. Monson, but was quite untrained to his desk work, and found it both irksome and puzzling, and was a decided trial to Mr. Grey's patience, who felt himself put upon by having such a raw article placed in his office. Edwin Cole had not only the repeated sharp reprimands of the head clerk to bear, but the jests of the rest to endure over his blunders and inefficiency. A threat to report him as incorrigible to Mr. Monson, brought such an expression of pain to the poor lad's face, that Arnold's pity was stirred as he passed his desk with his discarded torn sheets to be re-written. One of Edwin Cole's chief tormentors, whose whispered mischievous suggestions were frequently the cause of the lad's errors, had complained repeatedly of the draught from a window which Mr. Grey chose to have open at the top, and which was really a successful remedy against the otherwise habitual smoky chimney, though the raw November air, when the wind set that way, was not always a pleasing alternative. The idea suggested itself to Arnold that if he could effect an exchange with the tormentor he could protect the lad, and also put him in the way of his work, and see it done under his own eye before taken up to the head clerk. At the dinner hour that day Arnold made

the offer, saying that he should not be afraid of the window, and would like to move there. The proposal was welcomed with thanks, James Roberts declaring he had already suffered neuralgia and stiff neck from the old foggy's obstinacy. It was Arnold's turn to remain in the office that day whilst the rest went to dinner, and he asked Edwin Cole to stay behind also, to help to remove their respective papers, and take his dinner turn that day with him. Being left alone together, he effected his object by a few kind words of friendly counsel, offering to show him how to do his work in future. The youth gratefully accepted the kindness thus proffered, and confided how much he dreaded dismissal, being the only one of a large family able to assist his widowed mother by earning his livelihood. Before the return of Mr. Grey, the condemned work had been done afresh correctly with Arnold's help, and carried up to the head clerk's table, ere Edwin, with his new friend, went to their mid-day meal. No more "unpardonable blunders" were committed, and the reprimands and the outcoming jests at his expense alike ceased. The cause of the sudden improvement did not escape the keen eye of the head clerk, who, satisfied by this experiment that there was the making of a steady worker in the lad under good instruction, gave in a favourable report the following Saturday night to his chief. A violent fit of sneezing, betokening a severe cold on the part of Arnold, attracted the attention of Mr. Grey, who volunteered that the window might be pushed up a little higher, if the occupier of that desk found it injurious. Arnold acted on the permission,

but said he did not attribute his cold to the draught, but to getting wet the previous night. Having discovered that the young clerk was not in very safe quarters, lodging under the same roof with some young men who were trying to lead him into paths he had been taught to avoid in his home, Arnold, seeing that he had won the confidence of the orphan youth, asked him to give notice at his rooms, and take up his abode with himself instead. His landlady being only too glad to oblige, she said, a gentleman, who gave no trouble in the house, readily agreed to put up a small bed in the dressing-room opening out of Arnold's sleeping apartment. The orphan's saving was very considerable by this arrangement, as also in the matter of board, as he had been at the mercy of his reckless companions before. Now, on his return home on Saturday nights to his mother, with whom he spent his Sundays, after his nine miles' walk he could carry back something to her out of his modest salary, instead of suffering from the dread of getting into debt as before. Deeply grateful was the mother to the stranger who was watching over her fatherless boy with an elder brother's kindly care. Arnold resolved it should not be his fault if the lad were led astray, remembering his remorseful regrets by his brother's coffin. He found his young companion to possess a very responsive affectionate nature, and had no difficulty in inducing him to forego all the temptations of drink, by becoming, like himself, a total abstainer. After he had once taken him to the vicarage, he no longer had any anxiety respecting his evenings during his own absence,

When Christmas came, Arnold accepted an invitation to spend his week's holiday at Beechwood, going down with his friend Hubert, whom he had met at the railway station. He had been asked from Saturday to Monday several times by Mr. Randolph, but had refused on account of his regular Sabbath class, which he did not like to relinquish.

"I'm so glad for Sybil, as well as myself, that you have said yes, at last, to my father's invitation, Arnold," was his friend's greeting as he got into the train.

"I'm sure I feel it very kind in Mr. Randolph, after my seeming ungraciousness, but Mr. Fisher's eldest son is at home, and so will take my class on Sunday."

"To say the truth, I almost feared it was hopeless. I made sure you would have been booked for Downton."

"No, it would not do, and my mother saw it in the same light, and as she and my father and the young ones are to spend Christmas at Robert's house, it will be better for all than a Christmas at home with such sad memories and blanks."

"Well, I shall be the gainer, so I won't quarrel with any one, but I hope you'll be able to run home after a while."

"I hope, perhaps, to manage it at Whitsuntide, and get a longer holiday then by taking a short one now. Alice usually spends May and June with an invalid aunt, her own mother's sister, whilst the Wartons go to London for part of the season, so the coast will be clear then for me."

"Has Mr. Warton married twice, then?"

"Yes, and the result has been trying to his elder daughters, especially to Alice, who had kept her father's house for two years. I daresay, as in most cases, there were faults on both sides. Alice admits it was so at the first outset, but it is not a happy home for her, especially since her sister has been away so much, staying with the parents of her future husband, who, having no daughter, make a great deal of her, and she is to be married at Easter. It was one thing that made it harder to me to come to the final decision, knowing it would oblige her continuance at home. I'm sure Alice has tried hard this past year, ever since she saw the importance of giving no just handle against her Christian profession, but I fear it is very trying, poor girl, and she lost her usual autumn visit to the north this year, because Mr. Warton feared we might fall in with each other somewhere, or somehow, so my mother tells me."

"From which, doubtless, you draw comfort in the obvious inference, that Mr. Warton does not consider his daughter cured of her folly yet; eh, Arnold."

"I confess my spirits rose after the intelligence, though I regretted the poor bird was kept so closely in her cage."

Sybil's delight was great in having her friend at Beechwood once again, and though it was not always possible to avoid retrospects of former happy Christmas seasons, the welcome he received from all the family made his holiday very pleasant and refreshing. He made the most of the pure country

air to which he had been a stranger the last six months, and returned invigorated in mind and body to run with patience the race set before him.

CHAPTER VII.

I will pity the sorrows of all
Who are ready to fail in the fight ;
And a word may be sent on my faltering breath,
Which shall save some desperate soul from death.—*B.M.*

ON a dark winter night in February, a handful of small stones twice thrown up against Arnold Houlton's window, which was on the ground-floor, though raised a few steps from the pavement, induced him to get up and open it to inquire the object of the pebbly shower. Two girls of the factory class, with shawls over their heads, were standing below, and the younger one replied—"Willie Benson, what goes to your class Sundays and week-a-days, is very bad with inflammation, and wants to see his teacher as lives at No. 9."

"Is he so very ill? Has he had a doctor?"

"Willie says as how he don't think he can be worse, and he didn't want to die till he sees you. He said I was to be sure and say them words. Will you come?"

"Yes; but how shall I find out where he lives? He would not give me any address," responded Arnold.

"He didn't dare to, or father would half-kill him;

but we'll show you the way. Father ain't been home these three days or nights. Maybe he's took."

Arnold soon dressed, and going to Edwin Cole, who had, as he guessed, been awake also, explained his errand. On his road he passed a gentleman whom he knew to be a doctor, out on some equally sudden call, and it crossed his mind that he was braving appearances by being seen in his present company at such an hour in the morning. But the summons was one not to be refused. It came in the work for the Master. Was it not cast at Him that "He cateth with publicans and sinners?" The servant was not greater than his Lord, that he should shrink from the approach of fellow-sinners. From an inquiry he made, he found that the girl who had been the spokeswoman was not related to the elder one, who had come as guide, knowing the road, which the other did not. Both appeared alike ignorant and regardless of the serious concerns of their souls, or of what must follow the death of the body. The elder one, indeed, affected not to believe in any hereafter, and that the only business of life was to get as much enjoyment out of the present one as possible. There was a hollow, forced sound in her laugh, which induced Arnold to ask, if she was succeeding, whether she could honestly say she was happy in her course of life?

"As well as hundreds more," was the evasive answer, but the sudden shadow on her face and bitter tone told a truer tale as she turned off, saying to her younger companion—"You know your way back from here."

Arnold could not forbear saying, "You are not deceiving yourself or me; you are not happy, and never will be, till you come to my Lord and Saviour, who alone can make you so."

"I don't reckon He'd care or trouble Himself over Wild Madge," was the parting response, as she disappeared up an alley.

Arnold's heart sank as he thought of what an amount of heathendom there was in our large cities, and if it saddened him, how must the loving Master above grieve over the ruined souls who would not heed His call. Perhaps, because there were so few labourers, that call did not reach too many of the weary and sin-laden ones at all; the thought roused him from his reverie to speak a word to the girl still by his side, and he asked who was nursing the sick boy.

"I sees to him a bit when I'm in of an evening. I work all day at a factory."

"Have you no mother?"

"She's his mother, not mine, but she don't treat him no better than if she wern't his own flesh and blood. She drove Betsy, that's my elder sister, away long ago, and I'd have gone too, but for Willie, he's so fond of me, and there's no one else to care for him. She threw him out of window when a baby in her drunken fits, and hurt his back, so I carried him about till he was near four years old, before he could walk anyhow. He'd had a pretty many falls from her arms when she fell about with him, till I took him into my keeping, and said I'd be nurse, and she wern't to touch him. I didn't go to the factory

then, but stayed at home, and did all the work. Then father came home savage with drink, and had a fall out with mother, and she was as bad. I was gone out to get something to cook for supper, and Willie lay on the floor, and when I came back he was crying, and father banging him to make him quiet, so I picked him up and carried him off next door, and they found his leg was broken. Poor little chap, he had got kicked in the row. I took him off to a man what sets broken limbs cheaper than the doctor, and father wouldn't have no doctor fetched for fear he should get took up for it. You know Willie's leg has grown out, besides being shorter nor the other, and he's never been able to walk with it, but I got him them crutches last year, and he gets about now; that's how he comes to your class, only he's very tired if he goes far. If he could get up to the beautiful land on high he lies and sings about, it would be a rare good chance for him, I'm thinking, though I'd have nobody left to care for then."

Arnold listened without comment to the sad story of his little scholar's life of pain; then, taking advantage of the admission of a belief in another better state of existence above, he said, "It may be God's loving purpose to take your little brother away from the sorrows of his life here, to live with Jesus who died to win a place in His own bright palace home for him; but He has plenty of room there for you also, and would so gladly prepare a place for you too. Won't you come to Willie's Saviour and be His scholar, that you may not be divided from Willie hereafter?"

"I'm not like Willie; he's so good, he's so patient, he gets cuffed as he lies in his corner by father and mother, and called names for being idle and not earning his own bread, but he never gives back a saucy word. I hates them, and I tells 'em so, and wishes they were dead. If Willie goes up to the better land I'll go clean away, and when I've lost him I expect I shall go to the bad altogether," and the girl wiped her eyes with the corner of her shawl, and showed the way up a crazy staircase out of the dark court, which had only one gas lamp at the further end.

In a large back attic lay on a low settle in the corner the sick boy. There seemed no other tenant visible in the room, but the heavy breathings denoted a sleeper in the further end. Milly took from a hiding-place a piece of candle, and lighted up the darkness, when Arnold's eye, taking in the whole scene at a glance, saw, by that further bundle on the floor, an empty bottle which had contained spirits, the label too familiar to his eye, "Houlton's finest gin," the agent of misery and sin in this ruined home. Putting the lighted candle in the neck of a fellow-bottle, Milly explained: "You see I was afraid to leave it burning lest she might set us all a fire, not but what I think she's safe for some hours now."

Arnold was rewarded by the loving welcome given him by his little scholar, who had been brought first by a big factory lad to his night-school class some months before, asking the favour for his little chum, though he wern't a factory lad. Willie had become the regular companion at Sunday School, also, of the

bigger lad, who said it was the only pleasure of the cripple boy's life, and he'd carry him if he couldn't get no way else. The instruction thus gained of the heavenly road had become the one joy of the little pilgrim's heart, and the longing to see Jesus and hear His voice had been growing stronger and stronger as the sounds and sights of sin became more grievous to him, and now the Heavenly Father was preparing a chariot to take him home by a short, sharp passage, to glory. One evening, the previous week, he had been shut out on coming home from his class, the father threatening to kick him down if he attempted to mount the stairs; he had got wet and chilled through, before Milly had returned from an evening spent with some of her factory companions. She had carried him up when both parents were safely asleep, but the evil was done, and inflammation of the lungs was quickly snapping the child's earthly bonds. Arnold had missed him on Sunday, and heard he had taken cold, but no more, and, indeed, his locality was a secret, as, with several of his scholars, whose parents having reason to fear the police, forbade any address being given to the teachers on pain of not being allowed to go again. Arnold had given little hymn books to all his scholars with his own name and address in each, that they should know where to find him if they should ever be so inclined, and thus Willie had known where to direct his sister this night to seek for his teacher.

"I'm sorry to see you suffering so much, Willie," said Arnold; "I've brought an orange for you,"

giving him a piece; the parched throat and lips drank in the cooling juice, whilst the large eyes spoke their gratitude—"It is so good teacher, but I must keep the rest."

"No, finish it all, I've more in my pocket; see, and you shall have as many as you like, Willie."

"O, that is good of you, teacher, but I don't think I shall want a great lot before I get up to the beautiful land, and then there will be the tree with all manner of fruits you read us about the last Sunday I was there, and the pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, coming out of the throne of the Lamb. Oh, I've read that over lots of times since. I know it off by heart, teacher, only my breath is so short;" he spoke with difficulty, stopping between the words, "I'd like to have said it off to you."

"And I should have liked to hear it, Willie, but I think you'll see it all soon, and that's better even than saying or singing it."

"Yes, teacher, I shall never be hot or thirsty any more, for the Lamb on the throne, Jesus, you know, will give Willie of the pure crystal water as much as he wants; won't He?"

"Yes, Willie. Jesus says, 'He that cometh unto Me shall never thirst, and there'll be no more pain, nor crying, and no night there, and——'"

"They need no candle," said the dying boy, "nor light of the sun;" his breath failed, and Arnold went on, "for the Lord God giveth them light; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."

"And they shall *see His face*," murmured the boy, the golden words of the chapter he had committed to memory echoing in his ear.

"Yes, Willie, that's what you have longed for so often when you said your hymn—

I think when I read that sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men.

I should like to have been with Him then ;

but it will be far better, for after a little while you would have been left behind when Jesus went up to heaven, but now, Willie, you will go no more out, but be for ever with the dear Lord."

"And, teacher, I shan't be helpless and useless then, for, you know, He says His servants shall serve Him ; so I shall be able then to do His will as it is done in heaven. I want to now."

"You are doing it now, my dear boy, by suffering His holy will in patience, and in a little while you'll serve Him joyfully above."

"Teacher, I do want to ask you about Milly." The sister had lain down a little way off to get rested for her factory work in the morning, having been up all night with the sick lad. "Milly's been so *good* to me ever since I was a baby. She's done everything for me. But when I'm gone up she says she'll go right away—and there are such bad ones to lead her wrong—but Jim, who first brought me to class, teacher, told me his sister goes to one for factory girls that the minister's wife has. Could you get Milly into it, please, teacher ?"

"Yes, Willie; I'm sure Mrs. Fisher will be pleased to see Milly there; but will she come?"

"Yes, I'll go, if only to please you, Willie," responded the girl, who was not asleep, and whose eyes, though closed, were very far from dry.

"There's a dear old Milly; and you'll *not* go and live with Wild Madge, as she wants you to?" pleaded the boy.

"I don't want to go along with her. I told her so as she took me to the gentleman's house, not but what she means kindly to me, and has given me more kind words than most, but I can't bide here when you're gone, Willie;" and the girl sat up and wept bitterly.

"If Milly could go clean out of this court and live with Jim's mother, and go along with his sister to the other factory, wouldn't it be good?" said Willie, taking his teacher's hand in his anxious appeal.

"Would she have Milly, do you think?"

"Jim said his sister wouldn't mind Milly sleeping along with her, and she'd earn enough to pay her board fare," said Willie, "only Jim was afraid to ask his mother his-self. He said yesterday if you or the minister could speak up for Milly, she'd not be against anything you said, teacher; will you?" and the boy's large eyes looked as if they could take no denial.

"I'll do all I can, Willie, but I think Mr. and Mrs. Fisher will be best, and I'll speak for Milly to them."

"O, thank you, teacher, then I know it will come

all right, and Milly will learn to love Jesus, and I'll tell Him how good she has been to me, and I know He'll bring her home safe to me when she's ready. I'm quite happy now; I'm so glad Jesus is taking me, and I shall never have to go to those places no more to sing. I shall have a golden harp soon?"

"Yes, Willie, and learn the new song to the Lamb, who has redeemed and washed you in His own blood."

"You'll be so tired, teacher, you don't mind sending for you in the night? I did so want to see you."

"No, my boy, I'm so glad Milly came for me, and I'll come after my work, before I go to the factory class in the evening, but I think I must get back now, for I want to let Mr. Fisher know before I go to the office, that he may come to see you if he can in the daytime."

"O, that is good. I thought, as it was class night, you couldn't come to-morrow; that's why I wanted you so now; perhaps I'll be gone, but I'll try and wait till you come teacher."

Arnold stooped and kissed the pale brow, and then hastened on his return. The gaslight was burning low; the church clock struck four. He was hurrying home when he almost stumbled, as he turned a sharp corner, over a recumbent figure lying outside one of those gin-palaces which stud the corners of the streets, now closed and silent for a few short hours. He was about to pass with a shudder, thinking it to be some poor slave of

drink, when he thought he heard a groan, and looking again, saw it was a woman whose features did not bear the impress of drink. Seeing at the further end of the street a policeman, Arnold called his attention to the poor creature.

"Only a drunken woman turned out of the gin-shop; there's plenty of them as u'd fill the cells; better leave her alone," was the rejoinder.

"But I don't believe she is drunk, and she must be nearly frozen this bitter sharp night; there's been snow falling, and its froze on her clothes," replied Arnold.

At this moment a second policeman came up, about to change watch, and overhearing the last remark, stooped down, "You're wrong Jones, and the gentleman is right, there's no smell of drink about her, and her clothing, though thin and poor, is too tidy and clean for a drunkard—we'll take her to the station to get warmed and seen to, and if she don't come round we must have the doctor."

Finding the station was not very far out of his road, Arnold accompanied the men, and saw the poor creature placed in kindly shelter. Telling the sergeant in charge that he should call to hear what they had found out about her, Arnold now made the best of his way back to his lodgings. The world was now awake again, and the streets alive with men going to their work, for the church clock chimed six as Arnold turned into the terrace. It was too late to think of rest, so, letting himself in, he set light to his parlour fire, which by the time he had braced himself with a cold bath and re-dressed,

was burning up brightly, and his kettle singing a promise of soon giving its aid towards an early cup of tea. It was an opportunity, not to be lost, of writing some letters for which he had scant time save late at night usually. A long letter to his mother was finished for early post, and a quiet read of his *Lamp of Life* enjoyed before Edwin Cole entered in time for their usual united worship before breakfast. The night scenes naturally formed topics for conversation during the morning meal.

"I shall give you the slip Edwin for once, as I want to be off to the vicarage to see Mr. Fisher before going to the office. I had thought of sending him a note, but I can tell so much more by word of mouth."

CHAPTER VIII.

I looked, and the soul of a child of God
Went up to God through the cloudy skies
At the hour of the evening sacrifice,
As the ransomed people go one by one,
To inherit the kingdom beyond the sun.—*B. M.*

ARNOLD transacted his business with the vicar, and obtained his assurance that he would see the dying boy, and endeavour to set his mind at rest about his sister, for whom he would find some safe shelter. Thus satisfied, he went with a lightened heart to his work, but his thoughts were in the attic many times, and he caught himself nearly writing "Willie" in the place of a customer's name. He had an intense

longing to see the child once again, whose face he knew he should so greatly miss at his class, Sunday and week-days. It would be quick work, but he could visit him before the evening-school if nothing detained him beyond the regular hour at the office.

Arnold had closed his desk, and was about to quit the room, when Mr. Grey received a message from Mr. Monson, through the tube at his side, desiring Mr. Houlton to come to his private office. Since he had been amongst the younger clerks, Arnold had rarely seen Mr. Monson to speak to, unless Mr. Grey sent him up, as he sometimes did, to make an inquiry or explain a matter, to save his own steps, when Arnold was always selected for the purpose.

It was very unfortunate and rather annoying, Arnold felt, that, when he had not five minutes to spare, he should be required, but, of course, there was nothing to be done but to obey the summons with a good grace. When he entered the merchant's room he was in conversation with his son, who was about to leave, but, some discussion arising, it was over five minutes, and nearer ten, ere Mr. Monson was at leisure and summoned his clerk to his table, who was, it must be confessed, chafing under the delay.

"I have sent for you, Mr. Houlton, to speak with you on an unpleasant subject. You must be aware, from what passed in this room on our first interview, that my interest in those employed in this house extends beyond the fulfilment of their duties in it." As the old gentleman paused, and

seemed to look to his clerk for some response, Arnold, wishing to hasten and not delay the interview, replied—

“I am aware of it, sir.”

“Then you will not be surprised that I take cognisance of what passes outside the counting-house, and of the way in which those belonging to this firm spend their leisure hours?”

A pause, as if an assent were expected, but Arnold remained silent, so Mr. Monson proceeded; “You will scarcely wonder if I view with grave regret, to use no stronger term, your hours and associates, and feel it to be my duty to remove from further contamination the orphan youth, whom you have drawn under the same roof as yourself.”

“I am content, sir, to refer you to my vicar—to whom you were the means of introducing me—as to the employment of my evenings, which are placed at his disposal, and are under his direction. As I have a very pressing appointment, which I cannot forego, you must excuse my remaining longer.” And, looking at his watch, Arnold prepared to make good his retreat.

“I must trouble you, Mr. Houlton, to answer one question before you go. Am I to understand you to assert that it was under Mr. Fisher’s direction, the esteemed vicar of St. Paul’s, that you were, at two o’clock this morning, walking in the company you were seen in, and turning down into one of the most disreputable parts of the town?”

“You must excuse my declining any other reply than the one I have already given. I am content to

refer you to the vicar for that as well as the rest of my occupations. I'm sorry to be obliged to hurry away to keep my appointment. Good evening, sir."

A bow stiffer than that which greeted him on his first entrance into that office was the sole reply.

It did seem strange how the merchant could have learned his last night's movements, but Arnold was not ashamed of them, and all he cared for now was to reach the side of his loved little scholar. A quick half-hour's walk brought him to the court, which was now full of wretched-looking creatures of both sexes. The snow which had again fallen, was soiled, a fit emblem of the poor sin-stained souls of those who stood grouped around the gin-shops. Keeping his coat well buttoned up to secure his watch as well as for warmth, he threaded his way to the house he had visited in the early morning, but had nearly passed it when a voice was heard, "This way, sir," and he saw Milly on the look-out.

"How is Willie?" he asked.

"He's nearly gone; I found him so bad at the dinner hour that I've not been to the factory since. They may sack me if they like. I couldn't leave him no more. He was quite sensible when the parson came, and he telled me all about him when I com'd home, and said it was all of you that I was to go where I'd be comfortable, and be looked to kind-like when he was gone. After he telled it me out, he seemed so happy, and said, 'I'm ready now,' and he's not said scarce nothing nor took nothing since but your oranges, and he's been too weak for that the last two hours. I don't think he knows or notices now.

He seemed talking soft to himself, '*go no more out.*' Maybe he's been thinking of not having to go out to the public, as father made him go last week to sing, poor little chap. He was singing one of his hymns; so beautiful his voice sounded, and father came in and heard, and said as how he'd make him sing for his living, and took him out into the drink-shop, and Willie heard the landlord say that night to father, that he would give him as much as he wanted to bring him again to draw the folks inside; and so Willie said next morning he couldn't go again, and father gave him the strap, and said he'd make him go that night; but Willie crept out afore father came home, and went to class instead, and then, when he got back, father dared him to come upstairs, as he'd kick him down, so he sat out, and got wet through in the cold, till I found him and carried him upstairs, but I couldn't dry his clothes nor warm him ever so long. When he was took ill, he said he was glad, as he should not be able to sing or go out no more."

"Dear little Willie; what a grand, brave soul in that poor, weakly, crippled frame! Won't it make you brave, Milly, to stand against wrong, when you think of him?"

This recital had been given as they mounted the long flights of stairs, and at last stood by the little form so near parting from the gentle spirit it contained. Arnold felt it was a light cross to take up to bear reproach for such a joy, as he felt in knowing he had been permitted to lead this precious child out of the shadow of death, and to guide his feet into the way of peace. That *wondrous, solemn* joy of the first

known soul won for Christ! As he watched the faint breathings, it seemed as though he could see the Master standing by, and waiting with tender outstretched arms to receive the child from his hand.

At length he broke silence, and leaning over the couch said, "Willie." The loved teacher's voice seemed to recall the spirit just on its flight, and the boy opened his eyes, and gave a smile of recognition.

"Willie, you're nearly there. Jesus is waiting to carry you to His bosom."

"Shall see His face," murmured the pale lips in whispered tones caught by the ear so near to the little face, on which a smile of heavenly light played, as though the yearning wish were already attained; and so it was, the spirit had gone to Him who redeemed it, and was now about to glorify it.

After a few directions to Milly, and a gift to enable her to have all as she would desire for the earthly shell, as her last and best present consolation, Arnold took his departure, thankful for the absence of the degraded parents at such a sacred moment.

The church clocks warned him that it would be useless to think of returning to his lodging, so he turned into a confectioner's for a cup of coffee and a bun, and then reached the school-room, where the classes were held just in time as the door was closing for the teacher's prayer-meeting, which was held a quarter before the hour for assembling the scholars. Arnold felt a special desire for its refreshing season to compose and prepare him for his work, having had no quiet time as usual at his lodgings. When passing to his accustomed place at its close, the vicar laid his

hand on his arm, and said, "I went round to call for you, but found you had not been home. I'll tell you all about it after class is over."

"I was delayed at the office, and could only go to see Willie; he's gone, he went whilst I was there," responded Arnold.

"Your crown of rejoicing, Mr. Houlton, in the day of the Lord," was the low spoken rejoinder of the vicar with a joy-tear in his kindly eye.

There was no difficulty that night in arresting and retaining the attention of Arnold's class as he told them with whom he had so lately been, and spoke of "The home over there," which their late class-fellow had reached, and of his manly resistance of evil, overcome by the blood of the Lamb; and the hymn given out by the vicar, "O think of the home over there," was joined in very earnestly, but one voice, usually a leading one, felt unable to add its meed to the chorus; the teacher's ear seemed to be listening for the sweet tones that were swelling the angelic strains above, and would be heard no more below.

The vicar made Arnold walk back to his house and take supper there, of which he began to feel his need, and then communicated to him the fact that he had received a visit from Mr. Monson before going home to his country house, on the subject of his conversation with his clerk. He had had no difficulty in entirely satisfying him and disabusing his mind of its former unfavourable impression, so much so, that Mr. Monson had driven round to call and make his "amende honorable," where the vicar had found him waiting, and informed him it

would be in vain, as he felt sure his clerk would not now return till the factory class was over, after which he meant to retain him for supper.

"I'm glad my reputation is cleared in the old gentleman's eyes; he certainly did come down rather strongly about removing Edwin Cole from further contamination."

"Yes, that was a strong point with him, but I set his mind at rest, and told him, through your means young Cole had first come to my house, where now he spent three out of the five evenings he lives in town, coming to night-school studies of a higher class with my own sons in their evening hours, and the remaining two accompanying you to the choir practice; though, as he goes out on Saturday to his mother's for Sunday, I do not at present benefit by his voice, excepting at the week-day service on Fridays, as I do by yours in our choir."

"Well, I will say he takes a fatherly interest in his young clerks, so I've forgiven his accusation. I infinitely prefer serving such a man to one who cares only for the work he gets out of you, but I wonder who was kind enough to asperse me to him?"

"Probably he may not give up that information, but he stated to me that he should before he slept, set his mistaken informant right."

"Then the matter won't trouble me any further, nor disturb my night's rest, which will be a sound one, I think; by-the-by, I had no time to call at the police station about the poor woman."

"I did so this morning in consequence of your

report, and found she had been taken to the hospital, where I have since visited her; she's sinking from want and exposure. One of the police recognised her as the wife of a man who spends his all at public-houses, and she appears to have gone to seek him, to try to get some money to buy food, as he had taken all her earnings, and she was left destitute. A neighbour had kindly taken her child to share her fire and children's supper, though nearly as poor as herself, whilst the poor mother went to make a last effort to move her husband's pity. The landlord had turned her out when looking for him, and she had been seen sitting outside watching by some of those who left when the hour for closing arrived, and must have sunk down at last through cold and exhaustion."

"Another victim of the drink producer and seller," was the sad reflection of Arnold Houlton, as he walked home with Edwin Cole, and, as usual, saw his father's name lighted up in all the flaring corner houses which he passed. Oh! must not a day of reckoning come for all this?" and he thanked God who had permitted him to see the evil and earn his bread by honest labour, which brought no sorrow in its wake to others.

He had not been half-an-hour at his desk next morning, before Mr. Grey transmitted a message to request his presence in the head office, the object of which Arnold had no difficulty in guessing; but having quite got over any passing feeling of indignation, he felt sorry for his chief's position, knowing that to his own nature, however wholesome the discipline of

having to confess oneself wholly in the wrong, the task is necessarily an unpleasant one, especially so for an old and punctilious man, towards one of his age. On entering the office, the old merchant looked up, and rising from his seat advanced some paces with outstretched hand :

"I have to ask your pardon, Mr. Houlton, for a wholly unfounded accusation. I hoped to have offered this apology last evening, but found you would not be at home till late."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Monson," taking the offered hand and giving it a hearty shake. "I heard that you were kind enough to call at my lodging last evening, but I had gone direct from the office to see my little scholar, who passed away, whilst I was with him, so happily."

"I wished also to have expressed then, as I do now, my sincere pleasure at the way in which I learnt from the vicar your time and powers are being laid out in the Master's vineyard, and my gladness that young Cole should be under your influence ; it was a lesson to me, I hope, not to judge from appearances again."

"They certainly were against me, sir, more perhaps than I was aware of at the time ; it will also teach me a valuable lesson on the importance of abstaining, as far as possible, from all appearance of evil, though I don't know that I could well have avoided it yesterday."

"No, indeed, a call to the dying was not to be slighted for any selfish consideration of man's estimate. My informant regretted his own hasty one,

and confessed having expressed himself according to his own pre-conceived notions, without due regard to accuracy, impressing me with the idea that he had heard you talking and laughing with your guides."

"I fear the elder one did laugh, though not so much I believe at the solemn consideration I was trying to place before her, as to affect a content with her condition she did not really feel. I don't know if it were wise to have entered into conversation at all under the circumstances, but I did not feel easy without making some attempt to bring God's truth before them. I hope the younger one will be rescued in time, and placed under good influence, through Mrs. Fisher's kind efforts."

"But by your placing that lady in possession of the circumstances, as the vicar told me, I hope, at least, this mistake will not be without the good result of our both understanding each other better in the future," said the old merchant, with a cordial parting grasp of his clerk's hand, as he left the room to return to his work.

The following Sabbath, after greeting his punctual teacher at the entrance of the school, the vicar observed, "If you can find time, the poor woman whom you rescued in the snow has expressed a longing to see the gentleman who saved her from dying out in the street."

"I can go to the hospital direct from morning service, if that is all," was the reply.

"On condition you report yourself at the vicarage before going to afternoon school. I can't sanction your losing your dinner, remember."

"Very well, I'll obey directions, Mr. Fisher, at least as far as possible."

The saving clause was wise, for as the sequel proved, the time taken up in the walk, with the delay before gaining admittance to the ward, owing to its being the dinner hour, a forbidden season for visitors, absorbed every spare minute, and brought in Arnold, to the surprise of his class, five minutes late; he had walked quickly, as was evident. The vicar came in to close the service with short address and prayer, as the younger children did not attend the evening church. Then putting his arm into Arnold's, he said, "Now, you must come back with me, and make up for being a defaulter at dinner, before the next service."

"I really could not help playing truant; it might have been better if I had gone after dinner as it proved a wrong hour, and but for your card I do not think I should have seen the poor woman at all, but I am very glad I succeeded at last. She evinced such gratitude for the simple act of bare humanity, of not leaving a fellow-creature to die from exposure, and it was very touching to see the chief object of her desire to speak to me."

"What was that?"

"After thanking me, and saying she heard my words of pity, but remembered no more for long after, she said so simply, 'Ah! sir, I'm a dying woman; shall I see you in heaven?'"

"I told her I trusted we should meet there if she believed in my Saviour, as I knew of Him only as the Way, the Truth, and the Life; and such a joy lighted

up her sunken eyes as she said, 'Thank the Lord for it. I hope you'll pardon my boldness in asking such a question, sir, but there are so many young gentlemen out for their amusement who don't care about souls—their own, or other folks either.'"

"Is that your little girl? I asked, as a fair child sat on the bed nestling its head on her shoulder."

"'Yes, sir, the good woman who took care of her the night you found me in the snow, brought her here this morning, for she can't afford to keep her, though she'd like to, and her husband said she must bring Annie here, or he'd give her up to her father, and I'd sooner see her dead in the snow than that, sir.'"

"The child began to cry—'Mother, you'll take me with you, you won't let father have Annie.'"

"'You see, sir,' continued the woman, 'he has starved us, and what I can earn he has taken by force, and he swore he'd take Annie to the public, to make her sing like Dick Jessop took his cripple boy Willie. The publicans, they like to have a pretty child to sing, and draw folks round the door, and in at last to spend their all on drink. Annie, she learnt to sing at the Infant Ragged School lots of hymns and pretty pieces, and my husband said he'd get his drams for nothing, like Dick Jessop; but Annie hid away at the good woman who gave her a bite with her children and let her warm at her fire, but he kept me without a penny for food or firing, and threatened to do for me if I didn't tell where Annie was, but I couldn't, and I was so clemmed with cold and hunger. For two days I hunted for him, and another poor wife like myself stood outside and told me my husband

had gone in there, and I went in when the door opened, and begged of him for ever so little to keep me alive. He was not got savage drunk yet, and he was putting his hand in his pocket to get me a coin, I think, when the landlord, who didn't want to lose any of his gains, took me by the shoulder, and pushing me to the door, said he was not going to have his civil customers disturbed; he couldn't allow matrimonial quarrels in his house, and if I didn't go he'd have the police after me for creating a disturbance. I couldn't resist, I could hardly stand then, and the fumes of spirits, and the heat, coming in from the front, made me dizzy. I sank down outside and sat watching, but I never saw him go out; I expect he went away by the other door, and soon I was too cold and faint to move, and the snow came down on me as you found me, sir.'"

"The poor woman was a long time telling her tale, her breathing was so short—another case of inflammation of lungs, like Willie, from exposure this bitter weather; and the child kept reiterating the appeal 'not to let father have her,' whose drunken cruelty she was too sadly familiar with. It seems the matron, who came in and spoke very kindly, has agreed to suffer the child to remain with the mother at present, as the only other occupants of that ward were more than willing it should be so. The poor mother's one anxiety is for her little Annie. I promised to write to my mother, who is a subscriber to several homes for friendless children, and I know has sent one such in already."

"I am glad of that," said the vicar, "for there are

so many similar cases I should have no chance of success myself, and the workhouse authorities would refuse a child who has a father able to support it."

Two days later Arnold received a reply from home, directing him to send the child in charge of a railway guard to London, where it would be met and brought safely to Downton. His mother wrote: "Your touching histories of Willie and little Annie have so moved Mrs. Diploch's (the house-keeper's) heart, that she suggested having the child to sleep in her room, and nurse seconded the idea, saying she could be clothed from Miss Amy's left-off garments, and sent tidy to school, and trained up as a little maid. So let us know when to expect her, and tell the poor mother, if still living, that we will do our best to train up her Annie to meet her in heaven." Arnold carried the glad tidings, which made the dying mother happy, and as a patient was about to travel back to London the next day, the mother willingly agreed to let her child go under the woman's care, and spare her the dying scene which might leave sadder memories. The mother did not survive the parting many hours, and sank full of adoring gratitude for the loving provision for her child's safety. The neighbour who had sheltered Annie was with the mother at the last, she having first led her to a mission hall, where she learnt the narrow way of life.

CHAPTER IX.

Ever onward slowly tending,
Acting, aye, a brave man's part.

IN the month of May Arnold spent a week at his old home, where he was warmly welcomed by all ; but his mother's delight in his society was intense, and the time sped only too quickly. The day before his return to the north, he was looking for a volume, which would be useful to him in his classes, in the room still called the nursery, now used as work-room by the old nurse, who still superintended the ward-robes of the younger members of the family. Arnold had found the book on an upper shelf in the old bookcase. Nurse looked up, and observed, "That's like the very book as Miss Alice Warton got up on that chair to find some hard word in," says she, "last time she was here. She mostly runs up to say, 'how do you do?' to me as in old times. She's not one of them that forgets old friends, she doesn't; bless her."

"I'm glad you see her sometimes, nurse," responded Arnold.

"Yes, she's not changed, Mr. Arnold, you may depend on it, unless it's for the better. She stood a-looking at that picture of you as you gave me just afore you went away, but, says she, 'I don't like it as well as mine now, nurse.'"

"I have not seen yours, miss, but this one is as I've seen him look many a time."

"Yes, but now is not mine the nicest?" and she

took out of a pocketbook a little oval one put on a card, 'and that's his own hair anyhow,' and, of course, I telled her I knew that curl—hadn't I brushed your hair out some thousands of times as a little lad."

"Yes, and combed it just a little bit sharply sometimes; eh, nurse, when I wouldn't stand still?"

"Ah, Mr. Arnold, 'Boys will be boys,' and you led me a dance sometimes, but not like poor Master Hugh."

"And how do you like the book I sent you at Christmas, nurse; it is written by my good vicar."

"O, it's just beautiful; I've read it through twice, and I was going through it again. It was open on the table, with my spectacles laid on it, as I'd took off, when Miss Alice come in, and says she, 'What new book have you got there, nurse?' I telled her who sent it, and she took it up and looked at the writing you put in the beginning. She must have read it many times by the time she kept it open there, and presently she asked if I could lend it when I'd done with it. I said she was welcome to the loan of it, as I'd read it twice already, but I could always find something to lighten me in it, so she carried it away, but I think she's most forgot to bring it back. I didn't say nothing about it the last time as she came."

"Well, if her memory does not improve soon, you must let me know, and I'll send you another."

"Thank you, sir. Don't your locket need rubbing up? Shall I brighten it up and wash the chain, as I used to. I'll not be long upon it."

"Please, nurse, the smoke of Birmingham takes the shine out of most things. I'll leave it with you whilst I run down the village to see Widow Burns. I have not liked to spare time from mother before, but she has visitors now."

"Ah, it has done missus real good to have you here, sir; she do miss you, I know. But Miss Amy is getting a nice little companion to her grandma. Don't you think she grows more like her poor mother?"

"Well, nurse, I was such a child when my sister went to India, I don't recall her face, and the likeness sent home after her death was so sadly delicate and thin, so unlike my robust, rosy niece as she is now. I am so glad to find Alfred so much stronger."

"Yes, I have faith to believe he'll outgrow all that's wrong, and be hearty some day, and that comforts missus, too, wonderful."

Arnold took a few little gifts to old friends, and paid his visit to Widow Burns, the old woman who had spoken so bitterly of the ruin wrought in her son through acquiring the habit of spirit-drinking whilst under-keeper. He found, to his grief, that her fear of his becoming a poacher had been verified, and he had got into trouble and been in prison, and hadn't cared to show himself again in those parts; and now she had a sick daughter home from service. Arnold expressed sympathy in the widow's trials.

"I wish mother would not grieve herself over me," said the young woman. "'This sickness is not unto death, but unto the glory of God,' as the lady told us, and has been the biggest blessing to me. I've

learned to love God's book as I never did before. Perhaps you'd read a bit of it, sir."

Arnold took up the Bible, which opened at Hebrews xii., a sheet of paper marking it. The handwriting was very familiar and dear to him, and his eye feasted on the characters as well as the words of the hymn—

O eyes that are weary,
And hearts that are sore,
Look off unto Jesus,
And sorrow no more;
The light of His countenance
Shineth so bright,
That on earth, as in heaven,
There need be no night.

"Do you know them lines, sir?"

"No, Mary Ann, I don't remember ever having seen them before; but they are beautiful and true."

"Would you like to take them, sir? I knows all the verses off by heart, and says them at night when I can't sleep, so you're kindly welcome."

The offer was too tempting to be refused, so Arnold accepted the treasure, and transferred the hymn to his own pocket-bible, from which he read a portion before leaving the cottage—bestowing, in exchange, the leaflet of the sweet verses—

A little talk with Jesus.

His walk home was pleasant, as he thought how his Alice was learning higher lessons in the school of trial—his Alice still in heart, the old nurse's chat had plainly told. He had never thought of opening

the locket returned by her father with other trinkets he had given her, but he knew now the portrait and hair had been retained when the casket was given up. The kernel was kept, only the shell handed over. The old servant, ere she restored the chain and locket, cleaned the inside, and resolved, the next time her fair young visitor came to see her in the nursery, she should learn that her gift and portrait held its old place as of old. Arnold returned to his northern city work with his heart lightened and cheered, to run his race with patience and hope.

Not many weeks passed ere nurse's expected guest arrived; in fact, she lost no time in finding her way to the nursery after her return from Leamington, and found the old woman's talk so engrossing that Amy Leslie, coming up to find her, exclaimed, "I can't let nurse have any more of you, Alice. Alfred says you have been up quite half-an-hour, and he has lots of new things to show you in his microscope."

"Well, good-bye, nurse. By-the-by, I did mean to bring back your book this time, but I came away in a hurry."

"I don't mind if you keep it altogether, miss, for I've the promise of another enlarged edition."

Accordingly the volume never did find its way back to Downton from the Grange, being kept now with a clear conscience.

Time passed on, bringing a few changes in the office, and Arnold moved to one of the senior desks in Mr. Grey's room, and the old head clerk began to lean upon Arnold as his right hand, finding him willing to remain over hours to assist him at a time

of much pressure. He had a sick wife at home, and was longing to be with her, as Arnold well knew.

One foggy night in March, the gas having been burning all day, Mr. Grey felt sure the atmosphere would have tried sorely his invalid, and he was most anxious to get home to her. Just as he was about to lock up his desk, Mr. Grey discovered that a duplicate invoice which should have been made out by one of the clerks, had been forgotten, and must be done, as the cargo was to leave early next day. Arnold at once offered to remedy the omission.

"I will bring the key, and leave it at your house, Mr. Grey." The old clerk would not have slept in peace had he been without the key of the office, for which he was responsible. "You're not afraid of trusting me to finish this trifle."

"O, no, Mr. Houlton, and thank you. I have not been home in time once this week to see the doctor, and I do want to know his real opinion."

Arnold was not long in completing the invoice, and then, turning the key in the lock of the office door, and putting it in his pocket, he went downstairs. As he passed the end of the lobby of the next floor, he was surprised to see the glimmer of light beneath the door of Mr. Monson's private office. He stood still, and believed that he heard a rustle of paper; he supposed that gentleman had gone home two hours before. On descending the last flight, he met the watchman at the foot, who remarked, "You startled me, sir; I made sure there was no one left but myself and the dog. I barred the door again after Mr. Grey went out."

"I stayed to finish some work wanted early in the morning, Burton; but are you sure Mr. Monson is gone home, and Mr. Walter also?"

"These two hours, sir."

"Because I certainly fancied—nay, I'm sure—I saw a light under his office door as I passed down. Does he ever leave the gas on there?"

"Well, I have known it once or twice, but I don't think the old master ever did when he left last, as he did to-day."

"You saw him go, you're sure?"

"Quite positive. He got into the brougham, and said 'good-bye' to Mr. Walter, who stood on the pavement."

"And you don't think *he* could have come back?"

"Bless you, sir; why, I saw Mr. Walter walk down the street, and I've never been out of the hall till I heard your step now."

"Then I believe there's something wrong, Burton?"

"Fire, sir, do you mean?"

"No, there is no smell of burning, and the light is a flickering one. I believe there is some one in that room that has no right to be there, and now I think of it, I remember I heard sounds like a lock turning underneath when I was writing overhead, only I supposed it was one of the Mr. Monsons."

"What's to be done, sir?" It's as much as my place is worth to leave the building to get help, and the policeman on beat never comes here for another hour."

"No, that's not to be thought of. You and I and

the dog can manage the business; unmuzzle him just as we get to the door; this key opens it, I know."

"But suppose there are three or four men, sir; won't it be better to spring the rattle out of the passage window for help?"

"And wait an hour, give the alarm, and let the thieves get safe away out of the window meanwhile in the fog, and then find an empty room when we do go in. No, no. You are big enough for two men; the dog will master one, and I'm game for another, but depend on it there are not more than two. I remember seeing two fellows coming up the stairs as I came from dinner, and I wondered what work they had been about on the upper floor. I supposed them workmen, but they looked away, and I did not see their faces. Depend upon it, they have been laid up all this afternoon."

The watchman stood irresolute for a minute.

"If you don't like to go, I'll take the dog and venture it alone, Burton. They'll be off soon if we lose any more time."

"No, I ain't no coward and going to let you go in for it alone; the dog's a match for more than one man; he's awful savage."

"I'm not afraid of him, eh, Nero," said Arnold, patting the huge animal's head as he gave a friendly wag of his tail, as though to say we understand each other.

"There's a revolver here, sir. Mr. Walter bade me keep it safe, but the old gentleman don't care for such weapons, and I've never tried one."

"Nor do I like them any better; I'd rather have a stout stick; now walk softly."

As the dog approached the door, he showed signs of uneasiness, and at the same moment that Arnold turned the key silently in the lock, the mastiff sprang forward barking furiously. The thieves were paralysed with terror. They had just opened the window-shutter preparatory to making their escape with their booty, having rifled the iron closet, and placed the gold and notes to a large amount round their persons. Seeing there were only two burglars, Arnold desired Burton to prevent the dog from doing any injury beyond pinning to the ground the man whom Burton had first caught hold of; whilst he himself captured, after a longer struggle, the other robber, who was the more determined of the two, and was endeavouring to use a knife on his captor, but threatening to call the dog on to him, Arnold succeeded in wrenching the murderous weapon from his grasp with no further injury than some severe cuts on his right hand. The two burglars were securely bound with strong cords lying about from the rifled closet, and the booty restored to its place of security ere the rattle was sprung from the open window. Within an hour the men were lodged in gaol, and a telegram brought Mr. Monson to the scene, Arnold remaining with a policeman on guard in the office, as the locks were all useless, having been injured. The watchman, again at his post below, told his story to his masters, giving a faithful account of the whole transaction, awarding merited praise to his dog and the young clerk, and taking blame to himself for not having patrolled the upper part of the house with his dog that afternoon, when he might have discovered the men in their hiding-place.

Mr. Monson and his son, on reaching his private office, was surprised to see so little traces of the burglars' proceedings, as the door of the iron closet was closed, and all restored to its usual order in the room. Arnold Houlton was sitting at the table, which he had moved against the entrance of the strong cupboard.

"Mr. Houlton, we have to thank you more than I can find words to express for your gallant preservation of property of immense value," said the elder gentleman, holding out his hand to grasp his clerk's.

"I'm not fit to take hold of Mr. Monson, and could only offer my left hand, and that is too much stained to touch yours. I fear your letters and papers bear ugly traces of the sanguinary struggle, but I trust you will find your valuables all safe within the closet, which I have only been able to shut, as the locks are picked."

"I'm sure I can only echo my father's words, Mr. Houlton, and say how impossible it is to thank you for your presence of mind and promptness, without which the thieves would have decamped with all their booty, according to Burton's account. But I fear you have suffered serious injury by the look of your right hand," said the young man.

"O, I don't apprehend there is any serious damage, only the appearance is ugly, as the bleeding has been copious."

"I think you ought to have your hand attended to surgically without further loss of time; my brougham is at the door. I must beg you to allow it to take you anywhere you prefer," said Mr. Monson.

"Thanks, that is quite unnecessary. I will walk across the way to Bell, the chemist, as soon as I know you have found all safe in the closet. I should not be surprised if Nero's teeth have left their mark on the bundles of bank notes, as, fortunately for the robber he attacked, he had the parcel and a bag of gold fastened to his side just where the dog pinned him."

The boxes having been rifled, the papers were strewn inside the closet, but in a short time the pleasing fact was ascertained that nothing was missing.

"Your confidence in the old patent lock is gone now, father?" inquired the younger Monson.

"Yes, I must own myself worsted, and have one of the newer ones, as you have lately counselled. The Lord has been very good to us. Even you, Brownlow, have but a faint idea of the partial ruin we have been saved from by our brave preserver's hands. I'll tell you more when we have carried home the valuables for the night, and we must have all made secure to-morrow."

"I'm heartily glad it's all right, sir, and will now follow your advice and step across the road to be strapped up properly, and, as I suppose I cannot be of any further use, I will say good night."

"No, not good night, I shall fetch you in the carriage as soon as I've settled with Burton what companion he will have to-night. In future we must have a second watchman. I have been thinking of it for some time, and all would have been lost had he been alone this evening," said Mr. Monson.

"Or if poor old Grey had been his coadjutor,"

remarked Brownlow Monson. "It was most fortunate his going home as he did, and leaving you in charge, Mr. Houlton."

Arnold, glad in heart but faint in body, having long passed his supper hour, crossed the road and requested the chemist to see to his injured hand and fingers. "Very ugly, sir; these cuts ought to have been dressed two hours ago; really I should prefer your going to a surgeon."

"Nonsense, you are quite equal to such an emergency! Mr. Bell, I'd do it myself if it had not been my right hand. Really I'm too hungry and tired to go hunting after a doctor, and I don't know one."

"If that's the only difficulty, you need not go far," said a gentleman, who at that moment entered the shop. "I've brought a prescription to be made up for a patient, and I shall be happy to undertake the wounded hand if the owner will permit me."

"Certainly, sir. I'm only anxious to have it done at once and get home," responded Arnold.

The matter was being adjusted when Brownlow Monson entered, saying, "I am come to fetch you when ready; my father will take no denial."

"I'm afraid Mr. Monson's carriage will be kept waiting some little time," said the surgeon. "These cuts, as Mr. Bell justly remarked, are very ugly, nearly to the bone, and some muscles and nerves have got into trouble. My carriage is waiting for me, and if Mr. Houlton does not object to an open trap, I shall have the greatest pleasure in leaving him at his own door on my way home."

"I should prefer the open air, as I feel a little queer. Will you tell your father so, Mr. Brownlow, with my thanks all the same for his kind thought."

On landing his patient at his lodgings, the surgeon said he should come and look him up early before he started for the office next morning. It occurred to Arnold afterwards that the doctor knew his place of residence without asking. True to his promise, he came just as the two young men had finished breakfast, and, examining the injured hand, produced a sling to be worn.

"Surely I can keep it all right without that appendage, sir? I've no ambition to become an interesting object of observation as I walk along the street," protested Arnold.

"Whether you are able to use your hand in a few weeks as usual, or bring on inflammation, and incapacitate it for some months, entirely depends on your now submitting to the proper treatment, Mr. Houlton."

"You are rather severe in your decisions, Mr. Hall. Surely the case hardly warrants such a grave sentence?"

"Perhaps I am sometimes, but not unnecessarily so on this occasion, and, sling or no sling, you can't escape being a lion to-day at the police court, so, in for a penny in for a pound, you had better submit with a good grace," saying which the surgeon fastened on the sling and placed the wounded member in its right position.

"I knock under, sir, but I must decline the office of lion to the Birmingham public. The two burglars will suffice, and Nero, who ought to appear to witness to his most important share in last night's proceed-

ings. His strength and fierceness are very little if at all inferior to the royal beast. Indeed, I am not sure I should prefer meeting the one to being the object of that immense mastiff's wrath."

"Did he leave his marks on the man?" inquired Mr. Hall.

"No, I believe not. He is under good control it seems, and contented himself with obeying his orders to hold the robber down, whose sides were protected by the canvas bag containing some of the booty tied round his loins, of which we relieved him after his limbs were firmly secured."

"I mean to indulge in the lion exhibition presently, so we shall meet again ere long, Mr. Houlton. Indeed, I may have to take part, and be called on to attest to the injury inflicted by the burglar in his attempt to escape from his captor."

CHAPTER X.

*If some things I do not ask,
In my cup of blessing be,
I would have my spirit filled the more,
With grateful love to Thee.—A. L. Waring.*

ON reaching the office, Arnold found Mr. Grey in a very perturbed state of mind, not having heard of the burglary till his arrival there. "Dear me, Mr. Houlton, what will Mr. Monson say to my having left another to do my work, and let the key out of my own custody?"

"That it was a gracious ordering of Providence, Mr. Grey; indeed, as much was said last night, for, of course, an elderly man of your years might have become a victim to the ruffians," replied Arnold kindly.

"But giving up the key; after all these years to have been guilty of a breach of trust!" and the old clerk's face twitched with nervous agitation. "Such an example to those beneath me; oh, dear, dear!"

"But, Mr. Grey, you forget that I have had the key of Mr. Monson's office in my keeping on several occasions, when acting assistant in his own room, when I first came here, so there could be no possible harm; and if you had not given it to me, the thieves would have escaped with all the treasure, so that it was the saving of the whole, that act of yours."

This aspect of the case had a more comforting effect.

"Well, it does seem so; but yet I shall not feel easy in my mind till I've seen my employers. Is your hand much hurt, sir?"

"O, not of any moment, only doctors will be tyrants; and Mr. Hall, in particular, he would have his own way about the sling, but I can do plenty of work without my pen."

The head clerk handed over some accounts to check, and soon left the room to have his dreaded interview over with his chief, the anticipation of which, as in many instances, proved much worse than the reality, and his mind was quickly set at rest. He soon returned with a request that Arnold would repair to the merchant's office at once.

Arnold found himself greeted by father and son in the kindest possible way.

"It may seem singular, but it is no less true, Mr. Houlton, that just *before* we received the summons last evening my son and I had finally resolved to offer you the post of cashier and assistant to myself in my private office, as we have decided on opening a branch house in London, of which my son will take charge, and I shall need here in his place an efficient colleague whom we wish to reside on the spot if possible."

A slight pause occurred, during which the elder merchant looked towards his son, and Arnold, supposing a rejoinder was awaited from him, assured them of his pleased acceptance of the position thus kindly offered.

"I was about to add that it was our desire to testify our sense of obligation to you for last night's gallant conduct, and as the proposal originated with my son, though meeting with my own hearty and entire assent, I paused to see if he would like to mention it to you himself."

"No, father, I think it should come from you as head of the firm."

"Very well, as you like, Brownlow. Then, Mr. Houlton, it is our joint-desire to offer you a junior partnership in the firm, on terms mutually satisfactory, I trust, with residence in the adjoining house, which I lived in on first beginning business. It has been let since my son moved away at Mrs. Brownlow's wish into the suburbs, but has just fallen vacant, and is now under repair."

Another short pause occurred, broken by Arnold's low rejoinder, whose voice was a little unsteady.

"Mr. Monson, Mr. Brownlow, really I am at a loss to express my feelings, you have taken me so completely by surprise, such an unlooked-for, generous proposal, so far exceeding any service I've been able to render."

"Not so disproportionate as you modestly imagine. The property you saved amounted to an immense figure, the loss of which would have rendered impossible the new branch London house, and also crippled the business here. You look justly surprised at such a stake being deposited here. My son was equally amazed till I explained that, owing to a change in an investment, I had placed temporarily a large sum in one of the banks here, but receiving a friendly hint of the directors having been engaged in a high speculation in some very unsafe securities, or rather insecurities, I suddenly withdrew the amount lodged, and placed it for a few days in the iron closet safes."

"Which, pardon me, father, proved unsafes."

"I admit the impeachment, my son, and before night the best patent locks will be substituted for the obsolete ones; but I trust now, Mr. Houlton, you will see you are not so much incurring an obligation as giving us the pleasure of repaying a portion of our heavy debt."

"Indeed, I feel as if my brain must be playing tricks with me, if I'm not in a waking dream," said Arnold, passing his hand over his brow.

"Quite a sober reality, Mr. Houlton, as you will find," remarked Mr. Brownlow pleasantly. "The

carriage is at the door to convey you and ourselves to the police court to get these burglars committed for trial."

"You must excuse my lack of power to express my sense of your own and son's generosity, enhanced by the delicacy with which it is conferred."

"Nay, it is simple justice, my dear sir," said the elder merchant, laying his hand kindly on his clerk's arm. "You would hardly deem the lad overpaid who, having picked up a purse of gold, received a sovereign as recompense from the grateful owner, and the case is analogous. The deed of partnership can be filled up on our return from the court."

Arnold looked as he felt surprised at the rapid course of events. Mr. Monson's keen glance observed the young man's start of astonishment.

"The fact is, the papers have been prepared a long time. I had another young man in view, but at the last moment circumstances came to my knowledge which caused the negotiation to be broken off, and the blanks need only filling with your name, to make the firm henceforth Monson and Houlton."

The evidence tendered secured the committal of the two prisoners for the approaching assizes. Arnold did not escape without being complimented by the magistrates on his prompt action and presence of mind.

The evening of this day was spent at Mr. Monson's country house, where, in his library, after dinner, the important deed was duly signed

which thus transformed Arnold into the partner of a wealthy and honourable firm.

"You feel no qualms of conscience in entering *our* house of business, eh?" inquired the old gentleman, with a peculiar twinkle in his gray eye.

Arnold looked up in the act of affixing his signature. "Why should I, sir? I have never known any but the most scrupulously honourable conduct in your business arrangements."

"I am proud to know it is so, and to recognise the same high principle in our new partner, but I believe this is not the first partnership he has been offered."

Arnold gave a quiet smile of assent.

"Pardon my alluding to the matter, Mr. Houlton, but the circumstances which led to your quitting home, and the heavy sacrifice you made, became known to me this morning at breakfast. A gentleman whom you met just now at dinner, on hearing your name in connection with last night's transaction, told me the story, which strengthened our desire to have you associated with our firm. He has recently been visiting at the Grange, since his return from India, and gained his information from his god-daughter, Miss Alice Wharton."

Arnold's eyes sought the parchment in front of him, to which he put the finishing stroke, and for some minutes remained silent. The scene alluded to repassed before his memory with the struggle and the victory vouchsafed to him. All that he had then relinquished, so precious to him, he now tremblingly hoped was again within his grasp.

Thankful joy filled his soul, and when he could

command his voice, it was to utter in low accents the words, "God has been very good to me; I shall have happy tidings to send home."

"'Them that honour Me I will honour,' is a sure decree. Mr. Houlton, what do you think of taking a holiday whilst your hand is disabled. There are nearly three weeks before the assizes, when your evidence will be needed, and I can better spare you now than after my son leaves for London. It would be well for you to look over Manor House to-morrow, to be able to carry a faithful report. To those accustomed to the country, the garden is small, though unusually large for a town, but my late tenant added a nice little conservatory. You may wish to have the benefit of another person's taste before the painting and papering is done?"

"You are most kind, Mr. Monson, and seem to divine my wishes. I should like to take an afternoon train and surprise them at home."

Next day, before starting for the south, Arnold called on the surgeon for a final dressing of his hand, which certainly was not in working condition, and asked to discharge his debt.

"There is none on your side, Mr. Houlton; indeed, I shall expect you to call and see me on your return, as you will find care needed for some while, owing to the muscles and nerves being injured."

"I shall be glad to do so, if not really convalescent, Mr. Hall, but I must beg you to let me then, if not now, settle with you for your services."

"I repeat you owe me nothing; *my* debt, I feel, is hardly paid. Do you remember a certain early

winter morning in February last year, when the snow lay on the ground, and you were on an errand of mercy ?”

“Yes, Mr. Hall ; but what of that ?”

“Do you remember a stranger going up some steps, and turning to look at you ?”

“It had passed from my memory, but I do recall it now, and also the sensation of the passing moment.”

“Well, I was that stranger, going to visit a patient, to whom I had been summoned, like yourself, from my bed ; but I forgot to do as I would be done by, and placed an evil and erroneous construction on your late, or rather early, walk, and happening to see Mr. Monson on his way to his office that morning, mentioned the circumstance, colouring it, I fear, with my own impression. I was truly glad to hear the real explanation, but feel I owed you reparation for the harm my words might have done, and you must accept any trifling offices I can do for your hand as my compensation. Allow me to mention—in part excuse for what might seem a reckless piece of mischief-making—that Edwin Cole’s father some years back saved me by his faithfulness from infidelity, and I felt, in common gratitude to my dead benefactor, I ought to interfere to save his son from dangerous influences. I hope, Mr. Houlton, you will accept the apology as fully as it is offered.”

“Most heartily, Mr. Hall ; I am sure you acted from the best motives, and you see no real harm was permitted to arise ; indeed, my relations with Mr. Monson have been far more cordial ever since the

dénouement. I remember our vicar said one day that we may draw, from the healing of Malchus' ear, that the Master is watching to repair the errors of His servants, when, like Peter, they err from honest, though mistaken, zeal in His cause."

"It is a comforting thought at least, Mr. Houlton, but like that passage in Psalm cxxx. 4, 'There is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared,' should make us the more watchful not to wound any through hasty action, lest, as in this case, the Head be stricken in one of the members of His body. I hope you will let me know if, in any of your work among the poor, I can render medical aid."

"Thank you, Mr. Hall, I will not forget your kind offer, so I shall be a gainer always, you see, and will certainly report myself on my return."

As the train bore Arnold swiftly homewards with a heart full of thankful hope, looking back on all the way the Lord had led him, he recalled how the surgeon had addressed him by name on the night of the burglary in the chemist's shop, and known where to take him to his lodgings—all of which had passed unnoticed by him at the time. He found his friend, Hubert Randolph, on the platform, awaiting him, in compliance with his telegram.

"Well, old fellow, my prophecy will be fulfilled, only you'll not give your best man time to become a Q.C. That sling should move a heart of stone, but the parchment will do it. Ah; Arnold, how slow we are to believe that *all* things shall work together for good to them that love God, but it is so. How I should like to be coming down with you now, but duty first and pleasure afterwards, you know."

The two friends made the most of their time as they crossed London to the terminus from which Mr. Houlton, senior, travelled down daily to his luxurious home. The train was almost off when that gentleman hurried to take his seat—Arnold having kept one for him, and young Randolph conducting him to the carriage, where his son awaited him.

CHAPTER XI.

Speak gently to the erring,
Thou yet mayest lead them back ;
With holy words and tones of love,
From misery's thorny track.

"WHY, Arnold, this is a pleasant surprise!" exclaimed Mr. Houlton.

There was no opportunity for confidential communications in the filled compartment till the home station was reached, when they were met by the mother, whose delight was quickly clouded as her eye lighted on the sling which Arnold had effectually disguised from observation in the train under a travelling cloak.

"Only a piece of precaution, mother dear, and I've to thank this little ailment for affording excuse for this holiday, and seeing your dear face again, sooner than I expected, and I hope it will pave the way for my seeing somebody else, too, with father's kind help."

"My best services are at your command in that direction, if you only show me the way," responded his father.

"I fancy you'll not find it very difficult to re-open negotiations for me with Mr. Wharton with this document in hand;" and Arnold produced from his pocket the deed of partnership, and gave it to his father.

"I can't read by owl light, my boy, if your young eyes can; perhaps you can interpret for us."

"That makes me junior partner of the wealthy firm of Monson, Son & Houlton. That burglary in our offices, which has got into the *Times*, led to this happy termination."

"Your mother knows nothing of it. I thought she would only picture matters worse than the reality, so I wrote by early post to ask you for particulars, so now let us have them from your own lips."

The narrative was given graphically, but modestly, as to the speaker's own part in it. The excitement and delight of the younger members of the family were unbounded when Arnold arrived, for the wonderful adventure had just oozed out to the boys from the butler. Arnold was a hero of romance for that evening to the whole household, and his sling equal to an order of the legion of honour.

Early next morning Mr. Houlton went over to the Grange on his embassy of peace, and found Mr. Wharton, as he expected, in his study.

"I thought I should catch you before going out, Wharton," was his friend's greeting.

"Yes, here I am at your service, Houlton, but, to say the truth, I should have been out, only my *Times* missed yesterday, and so I have double work to-day. By-the-bye, I was just reading the Birmingham burglary case. I hope your son is not seriously hurt?"

"I trust not, only invalided home. My business with you this morning was to try and open negotiations on behalf of the junior member of that firm."

"I don't understand; you are talking enigmas, Houlton."

"Well, in plain English, as your objection to the engagement between our two young folks, and I don't blame you, was Arnold's want of means to keep a wife, he hopes, as junior partner of the well-to-do firm of Monson & Son, that obstacle is now removed. This document will show you I'm not jesting, but in sober earnest."

As Hubert Randolph predicted, this parchment did the business, and Mr. Wharton assured his friend there was no one he could more willingly receive under these altered circumstances. He did not deem it needful to say what a life he had led his daughter because she would not give a thought to either of the wealthy suitors he had urged upon her consideration, and Mr. Houlton, as a wise plenipotentiary, raised no unpleasant points.

"Then if Alice is willing to put on her hat and drive back with me, you and Mrs. Wharton will come and dine this evening and fetch her home."

No difficulties were raised by either party concerned to this proposal, and Alice was soon seated

in the dog-cart by her future father-in-law's side. The Grange boundaries were scarcely passed ere an individual, with arm in sling, was seen at the side of the road, and after a short parley, instead of his mounting into the vehicle, some one else descended, and making a long walk of a short one, the long parted ones only reached Downton in time for luncheon, both glowing with happiness. Arnold had sought and obtained full pardon for not consulting Alice before making the important decision two years ago.

"You were quite right, Arnold; you saved me from acting tempter to you, as I know I should have done then, but not now I hope, and this time of trial will make me a better helpmeet for you in the future."

"And you wont mind smoky Birmingham, Alice, for it is needful the junior partner should reside in the town."

Alice's response was of the most reassuring nature, declaring that anywhere with Arnold was preferable to the most lovely spot in the world without him. It was arranged she should spend the term of Arnold's holidays at Downton, where the intercourse of the young people would be more unfettered than at the Grange. Much was planned during the next three weeks, and several days spent in London in selecting papers, curtains, and carpets. Nurse was favoured with many visits to her domain, and taken into counsel on more important matters. The wedding was fixed to take place as soon as the house was ready for the reception of the bride, and it was resolved that the usual wedding breakfast

should be dispensed with, and the school children of the village and their parents regaled with a substantial tea in the park.

One cloud alone dimmed the sunshine of Arnold's visit—the habits of his second brother, Robert, who had taken his place, and, having married, had settled in the home once preparing for himself. During the frequent interchange of hospitalities between the houses, Arnold viewed with grief the evident tendency to indulge freely in stimulants on the part of his brother. It was impossible to be blind to the flush after dinner, the unsteady hand, the quick, excitable tones, and altered strain of conversation. The anxious watchful expression of the young wife was too plainly conscious and scheming to cover and disguise her husband's weakness. Was it possible the awful warning of the elder brother's end had been lost sight of? Could nothing be done? After much prayerful consideration, Arnold resolved to speak to his mother, and found she was already alive to the danger, though unwilling to admit its extent. Mrs. Houlton allowed that his father kept very close to business, and had not taken a holiday till the day after Arnold's arrival. She knew he did not find Robert such a good man of business as he had hoped. Arnold determined ere leaving to speak solemnly and affectionately to his brother. This purpose was confirmed by a conversation which took place between himself and his delicate younger brother, Alfred, who was greatly improved in health, and whose character was most satisfactory, giving promise of all that was good and noble. Under the

influence of his tutor the seeds of truth had been sown, and were now bringing forth the fruits of steadfast, earnest, Christian life. Arnold was thankful to see that Alfred took neither wine nor beer at the table, and told him so.

"I had some difficulty in persuading mother that I could do without any, but she is satisfied now that I've been even better this last six months, and Henry hardly ever takes anything. I wish you could get him to become an abstainer on principle; he only touches wine when Robert is here, because he does not like to be laughed at by him as a weak-minded teetotaler."

"Poor Robert must be blind indeed to his own peril to use such an epithet, unconscious how weak he is to give way to temptation daily. For his sake Henry should make a stand. One brother in a drunkard's grave is surely enough warning."

"Mother would like to leave off the little she ever takes, only father gets angry, and says he wont have her do it, and takes it as a slight upon himself. Robert's wife has begged her to prevent the supper tray with the spirits being brought up before they go home. They have had more than one narrow escape in driving home, and the groom has had to take the reins from his master's hands. Emma has given up sitting by Robert in front, on purpose that the man should be at hand, pleading she was too nervous to sit there."

It was a matter of great difficulty to get any conversation with Robert; he studiously avoided Arnold's society, except in company with others, and when at

last an opportunity was seized he refused to listen, giving way to angry language. Seeing his brother's frame of mind was unfit to receive benefit from his kindly meant counsel, Arnold desisted, but after a night of watching unto prayer, wrote most solemnly and lovingly that at least he might not have this brother's blood on his soul.

Ere he returned to Birmingham he had the comfort of leaving both Henry and Alfred pledged abstainers, and the night before his departure his mother came to his bedroom and told him she had firmly, but gently, spoken to Robert, and had entered into a compact with his wife not to have any more to do with the drink, which was ruining one so dear to them both. She added that his father had withdrawn his opposition, having become seriously alarmed at the rapid progress of the evil habit of his son.

One morning, about a week before Arnold's return to business, his father exclaimed behind the *Times* newspaper, which he was perusing at the breakfast table :

"A large bank gone smash at Birmingham, F. & Co. I hope your firm has nothing in it, Arnold."

"Mr. Monson, I know, used to bank there partly, father, but beyond his assurance to me that all was in safe investment, I know nothing comparatively as yet."

The next post brought a re-assuring letter from Mr. Monson, informing him that it was from that very bank he had withdrawn the large deposit which had been in the iron closet at the time of the burglary.

"Doubly lucky I call that," was Mr. Houlton's remark. Arnold, however, saw in the whole affair a higher guiding hand directing all things for one of His servants, who honoured His name and acted on the promise—"In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."

On Arnold's return the burglars met with their deserts at the Assizes, being sentenced to several years penal servitude as old offenders. The wife of one had travelled some hundreds of miles to see him, after his desertion of her for five years, in hopes of touching his heart, and moving him to resolutions after a better life, when his term should be ended. Arnold, having visited the prisoners, heard from the younger man the old story of evil companions met with first at the public-house, and leading him from one downward step to another. He promised to seek out the poor young wife, and found her with her little boy of seven years left destitute by the husband's crime.

"O, sir, indeed he was as good a husband as any woman could desire, till he took to the drink. He would go weeks without any, and was as sober a man as could be found, till he had a job of work at a gentleman's one winter, and he was treated with a glass of spirits to keep him warm. If they had only given him a cup of hot coffee instead, he would have preferred it then, for he had never used himself to spirits, but he learned that winter to like them, and got to dropping in at the gin-shops on his way home, and he lost his situations one after another." The poor woman had spent all to come and see the

man who had blighted her life by his evil habits, and was friendless in a large city. Arnold found her a safe resting-place with Jim's mother, and having ascertained, by writing to the minister of her parish, that she was honest and respectable, and had lived in service before her marriage, he resolved, with Alice's assent, to take her into his own household. The little fellow went to school in the daytime, and learned to clean boots and knives and weed in the garden. This kindness was repaid by grateful willing service by the widowed wife. Arnold had been unable to draw anything out of the older burglar, who seemed lost to all feeling of shame or sorrow. He had a daughter somewhere if she were alive, but he neither cared nor wanted to know; his wife had died in prison, and likely enough he should do the same. He sullenly refused any kindly counsel, declaring he was sorry his knife had not done better work and freed him from his captor.

The wedding took place very quietly a few weeks later, and after a short honeymoon, as business did not permit of Arnold's lengthened absence, the young couple settled down into their new home. The old manor house had been transformed into a very comfortable and pretty residence, and Alice declared she preferred having her husband back to luncheon, and within a few minutes' call, to the nicest country-house which would separate her from him all day long. Her days were fully occupied, as she found so many to help and teach and comfort among the families of the workmen of the firm. Mr. Monson entered into all her schemes warmly, and begged she would come

to him for any aid he could render. Alice soon put him to the test, when spending a summer evening at his country place, by asking for flowers from his well-stocked hot-houses and gardens for the hospital in the town. Henceforward she received a bountiful supply of lovely blossoms, brought up and left by the old gentleman's own hand at her door twice a-week, to which he often added a basket of fruit. Alice knew his time, and always watched to meet him herself with bright thanks, which the donor felt good payment. Once a-week she visited the hospital, carrying her bouquets, with texts attached, and spending a couple of hours in the wards winning the sufferers to listen to words of life, truth, and peace. Her other supply she carried to the homes of sick ones, where they gained her a welcomed entrance, and paved the way for a chapter read or hymn sung. Mrs. Monson had been a suffering invalid, confined to her room the greater part of the year. Alice pitied her loneliness, without any daughter to minister to her, and soon became a favourite with the old lady, interesting her in the calls of distress, seeking her counsel, and receiving her help. Alice became the dispenser of many gifts made on the couch of suffering, thus brightening the invalid's own life. The text-cards, in clear type, which Alice carried with her flowers to the sick, either in infirmary or elsewhere, were mostly Mrs. Monson's handiwork. Mr. Monson assured his junior partner that his young wife had brought fresh sunshine into his dear one's life.

On Alice's arrival one afternoon at the hospital, the matron met her with the observation, "There's a

girl in the accident ward very bad with a broken leg. She don't seem to have any friends to visit her ; no one has been to inquire for her since she was brought in last Saturday."

"Poor girl! May I go in and speak to her?"

"Yes, ma'am, I wish you would. She's rough and strange to us, but I can't help pitying her."

"What is her name?"

"Her real name we don't know, but the policeman who picked her up from under the horse's feet called her 'Wild Mag,' and said as how that was the only name he knew her by, and she suited it, though he didn't know but that she was better than many, and an honest girl, who had never been in trouble with the police."

With this introduction, the matron conducted Mrs. Arnold Houlton to the ward, which was tenanted by only two sufferers, at the further extremities of the room.

A girl of the factory class lay on the bed to which Alice made her way. A mass of dark, wavy hair had partly escaped from a net by which it was intended to be confined, and hung over her flushed face. On hearing a fresh footstep, the sufferer opened her eyes, very fine ones, whose expression was somewhat defiant, as if she would disclaim the right of being interviewed by a stranger.

Alice held out a bunch of mignonette and a rose, and asked, "Do you like flowers? I thought perhaps you might. I'm so fond of having them by me when I'm ill."

The defiant look passed away from the girl's face as she took the sweet flowers.

"I love them dearly, lady. Haven't I missed and longed for some! but how could you know?"

"Is your home in the country, then?" asked Alice, sitting down beside the bed.

"Ah! no, but I've taken many a long walk out on Sundays, though, to see the green fields and hedges, but I'd rather go short of something else than not have a penny bunch of flowers when I can get them."

"I always think flowers carry a message from God, telling us of our Father's kind thought of us in sending such lovely blossoms for our pleasure. Those in your hand He made with the purpose of cheering you on your bed of pain."

"How can you know that, lady? nobody cares for Wild Mag."

"You are mistaken, indeed. *I do*, and that is why I am here, and the matron does, and therefore she told me of your suffering, and *God does*. I should like to show you this, if I may read you what He says. May I, or will it tire you?" taking out her pocket Testament.

"It wont tire my head; your voice is so soft I'd like to hear, lady, for I'd be glad to think He did care about me."

"Then I'll read what God's own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, says about the flowers," and Alice read Luke xii. 27 and 28, "Consider the lilies," &c. "You see how highly the Son of God praised the work of His Father's hands, for Solomon was a very great and rich king, and had more glory than any before or after him. Jesus loved the flowers, and

wished us to consider and love them too, and learn a lesson of trust from them."

"I never knewed that before ; I'm real glad of it, too, but you said as how you knowed He cared for me. Is that, too, in your book ?"

"Yes, listen to this (Luke xii. 6, 7); you could not count these, laying her hand on the heavy tresses, but God reckons each hair up, so He must care about the owner of them."

"It do sound like it, only it seems too wonderful. But you said these flowers were sent on purpose for me. How do you know that; from your book too?"

"Yes, it is written, 'One of the sparrows shall not fall on the ground without your Father' (Matt. x. 29). So, you see, it is plain nothing can happen to a little bird without God's knowledge and permission, and much more to you who are of more value than many sparrows. When I left home with these flowers, I did not know who they were for, but my Father in heaven did, and sent them by my hand to yours."

"I'd like to think that; it would be real nice, though," said the girl.

"Shall I read you another true story, Maggie, to prove to you that Jesus knows all about where you and I shall go each morning, and what we shall carry in our hands?"

"Please do, lady."

Alice read from Luke xxii. 7, 13. "You see the Lord knew which way the man bearing the pitcher of water would go and the house he would enter, so

He must have known who was to have these flowers to-day."

"But, lady, if He knows everything, He'll be real angry, wont He?"

"Jesus is so holy He hates all sin, but He does not hate the sinner, He loves you."

Maggie shook her head incredulously. Alice read, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

"But," said the girl, "He'll not have any sinner in the golden city where Willie's gone, for I heard him say it in the public the night before he was taken bad, and Milly, that's the little chap's sister, wouldn't have a word to say to me after he died, because he made her promise not."

"No, Maggie, but Jesus washes away all the sins from the souls of those who come to Him, and saves them from sin now, and then receives them into His home above. But I'm sure your head is aching. I will not tell more to-day, but come again. I think, though, I could make your hair more comfortable. May I try?"

"Thank you," was spoken alike by lips and eyes, as Alice drew off the mass of dark hair from the heated brow and throbbing temples, and made it into a coil beneath the net, re-uniting the broken elastic which had let it escape. Then, kneeling by the bedside, she, in a few simple words, commended the poor girl to the Saviour's loving care for bodily and spiritual healing.

On Arnold's return home that evening, his wife

told him of Wild Mag, and he felt sure she was the girl who had helped to guide him to his little scholar's dying bed that winter night.

Milly was now one of their household, under good training. She was questioned if she knew anything of Maggie's doings of late, but she said, having promised Willie not to have to do with her, and being on the other side of the town, she had only seen her when coming out of a tea-meeting, and then, thinking she wanted to draw her aside, had not responded to her call. She believed she had kept on at the same factory as before, being a very good hand.

The next day Alice again obtained admission, through the matron, who said Mrs. Houlton's visit seemed to have made such a change in the patient, who was as quiet as a lamb. The bed in the further part of the same ward was empty. Alice had gone the previous day to see the occupant of it, but found her lying under opiates in a state of stupor.

Madge, seeing the look of inquiry in her face, observed—"She died in the night, and oh! she was awful—so afeared to die. It made me tremble to hear her go on. She was run over the day after I came here, and was that drunk she didn't feel nothing till next morning."

"How very sad," said Alice. "You were run over too?"

"Yes, lady."

"How did it happen?"

"I was just crossing over, coming away from the music-hall where I sing most evenings, when a cab came out of the bye street, and turned sharp round

the kerbstone, and the horse knocked me down. I expect I should have been killed if the policeman hadn't been standing at the corner and caught the horse's head, and made the driver pull back, whilst he lifted me up and put me into the cab and brought me here."

"Do you work in a factory in the day-time?"

"Yes; I've never lost time at work till now, but they'll fill up my place long before I'm able to go back to it, and never trouble to know if I'm dead or alive."

"Perhaps they don't know of your accident. I should think they would take back an old hand when they hear the cause of your absence."

"I don't care much if they don't; I'm sick and tired of the old life. I think I should like to go clean away."

"Have you been a singer long?"

"About a year, and I'm sick of that too. I'm fond of music, and so, having no one to spend my money on but myself, used to go to the concerts—not the penny gaffs. I like something better than that; and I'm fond of flowers, too, as I told you, lady, and I used to buy a lot in the market and make them up in little button-holes to sell to the folks who went in to the music-hall; and one evening I was sitting under an archway, making up the bunches and singing to myself, when a gentleman stopped in front of me, and I asked if he'd buy a flower for his coat? 'He said as how he'd buy half-a-dozen when I'd got them ready, if I'd sing my song again.' I asked why he wanted to hear it. 'For no harm' he replied, so I

sang on as I made up the bunches, and then, when I held up the six, I saw he had a companion just alongside, who said, 'That's a find for us.' Then they asked if I had a mind to come and sing at the music-hall as one of their singers had gone away suddenly, and promised me civil treatment and good pay if I'd come and learn up the songs; so I went, and soon bought a concertina and practised at home the new music, and I've had no reason to complain of my treatment. I sent a message by the policeman to the manager to say 'Scotch Maggie,' as they called me, had been run over and gone to hospital, but they've not troubled themselves; it's not their best time, and maybe they have picked up another instead."

"So you don't want to go back to the old ways, Maggie?"

"No, lady, I'd like to go out away into the country somewhere, where the flowers grow; aren't these beauties?" as she received the fresh ones Alice now took from her basket with a bunch of grapes.

"You think you'd be happier in the country then, Maggie."

"Well, I don't know, I'd like to get away from here, but the gentleman as came to see Willie when he was dying said I'd never be happy till I went to his Saviour. He talked that winter night to Milly and me just like you do?"

"Has no one else ever done so also, Maggie?"

"Only Willie. The night I took him back he'd been singing in the public, and the tavern-keeper told his father he should have as much drink for nothing if he brought him every night to fill his house, as he

had done that night, with fresh customers. I was in there for one, drawn in by his sweet singing. Willie refused any drink, so they gave him an orange, but when the little chap got outside, he told his father he'd never go again, or if he made him go he would never sing there any more. The cruel brute lifted his arm for a blow with an oath, but I snatched the child away, telling drunken Dick he had enough to do to get himself home, and I'd see to the boy. So we went round another way, and I told the little lad I reckoned he'd have to go and sing again, but he shook his head, and the tears came into his eyes, as he said he wished he had not sung at all. It was a wicked place. He was sure Jesus would never go there. It must be what he had read of in his little book, 'a synagogue of Satan;' only the devil's people would like to be there, and if I wanted to be good and happy, I must never go into the devil's houses. I told him I warn't one of the good ones, and he said, 'But don't you want to be one, and Jesus will make you good, and then you will be happy too.' I laughed it off, and said, 'How could he know I wasn't happy enough in my own way,' but he looked so serious like, and Milly was watching, and I handed him over to her and ran home. But I couldn't get rid of Willie's words or his song, and I never sat down again in one of Satan's synagogues, as he called them, though I've had a glass now and then since."

"Well, Maggie, if you've been trying all this time and not succeeded your way, wont it be best to try the better way, and come to Jesus now to be made good and happy. Jesus invites *you* to-day, but that

poor woman's day of opportunity, who died last night, is past and gone."

"I'd like to come if I thought he'd have me," and the girl's eyes were full of tears.

"But it is not *your thinking* it that makes the way open. God says it, so it's true. 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and *I will* give you rest,' are Jesus' words, and I think you are one of those weary ones, Maggie, eh? And He says, 'Him that *cometh* unto Me I will in *no wise* cast out.' He died for *you* on that bitter cross of pain and shame. He *loved you*, and gave Himself for *you*."

"He never could have loved *me*," sobbed Maggie, "no one ever has."

"Had you not a mother, my poor girl, once to love you as a baby at least?" asked Alice, whose eyes felt very responsive.

"She died in prison soon after I was born, so they called me 'Prison Madge,' till I grew big enough to fight them for it, and then they called me 'Wild Mag.' I never heard her name. An old woman whom I called granny brought me up, and let me out to nurse the neighbours' babies as soon as I could sit and hold them; but granny took to drinking, and beat me for everything bad or good, and when they locked her up, I ran away and lived with a woman who kept me to run errands and see to the children, and slave from morning till night, with more kicks than halfpence, till I was big enough to go to the factory. I lodged then with a widow, but she took my earnings, and kept me short of clothes and food too, but when I was fourteen I took a room to myself,

and have kept it ever since. No, I never had any one to *love me* or to love. A woman told me once that my father was a drunken man, who starved my mother, whom he had brought from the country, and she was taken to prison for stealing some bread out of a shop, and was glad to go there for shelter and food and safety from his ill treatment. The woman did not know my mother's name, only she was in the prison herself, and said she died happy; only cried because she could not take me with her out of this hard world; and haven't I wished I'd gone with her many times."

Alice's eyes were not dried by Maggie's sad story, but laying her hand on the poor girl's, she said, gently, "You remember we learnt yesterday that not a sparrow falls without our Father, so He had a purpose in keeping you alive. Do you know what it was, Maggie?"

"No, lady."

"It was that you might live to His praise and glory, and make glad the heart of Jesus, who loved you so, that He left heaven to come down to open the way for you."

"Will He take me just as I be now? Mustn't I wait till I can do something to show I mean to be different?"

"No, Maggie, only Jesus can make you different by putting His spirit within you. You must come to Him for that gift as well as for the pardon of all the past life."

"Will *you* ask Him to have me?"

"Yes, we'll both ask Him to take your heart, and

make it willing to trust Him for all, for I know He is willing and waiting for you to come to Him. Listen, it is written, "He is long suffering to us ever, and not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

The prayer of faith went up from the one, and the yearning cry of the broken and contrite heart, which the God of love does not despise, and the friendless and forsaken orphan found open the arms of love and power of the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. The wanderer who had found no rest for the sole of her foot entered into the ark and found shelter and welcome there.

Alice was prevented going again for some days, but sent Milly, with more flowers and fruit to render her a welcome visitor, as Milly felt doubtful how she would be received by Maggie after her refusal to recognise her in the street. But the change in the sick girl's tone and manner was so great that all doubts vanished with the warm greeting.

"Oh, Milly, it is good to see you come. I was thinking of Willie, and how I would like to see you. How did you know I was here?"

"Mistress told me all about you, and has sent you these," taking her treasures out of the same basket Maggie's eyes had become familiar with.

"What! do you live with that dear, sweet lady, Milly? You are a happy girl!"

"Yes, Maggie; when Mr. Arnold Houlton (Willie's teacher that you and I fetched that night) married, I went to live there."

"I'm so glad for you, Milly. Must not Willie be

glad if he can look down and know it! Do you remember what Mr. Houlton said that night?"

"No, Maggie, I'm afraid I didn't pay much attention. I was all upon Willie being so ill."

"He said I should never be happy till I came to *his Saviour*, the Lord Jesus Christ, and he spoke true. But *I am happy now*; the time don't seem long, night nor day, now, and the dear lady gave me this beautiful book," laying her finger on the small Bible on her bed, "and it's all full of His love."

"And you've forgiven me for not stopping to answer you that night in the street, Maggie? I was afraid you wanted me to go with you," said Milly, looking a bit anxiously into her friend's face.

"Oh, Milly, I wasn't cross with you. I knew it was for Willie's sake, only I wanted to ask you if you could get me into the Mission Hall where you went. I'd been to the door, but the policeman told me to go along if I hadn't a ticket, and he didn't suppose I had; Wild Madge wasn't one of that sort. So I went away down the street, but I came back when I heard the singing, and then a window was opened, and I could hear some of the speakers, and I thought I knew the voice of the gentleman who had spoken to me."

"Yes, Maggie, he was there that night."

"I know it, for when you all came out I was across the road, and I saw him with a parson, but, of course, he didn't see me. Then I watched for you, and crossed over to speak to you, only you turned away, and I felt fit to cry. I was so weary, and I did want to learn some more about Willie's Saviour."

"Poor, dear Maggie, I'm so sorry I didn't stop; but the Mission Hall was free to all except on tea meetings."

"Oh! I didn't know that, for another time I saw people going in, and there was a policeman walking outside, and I saw all the people had little print-cards in their hands when they went inside, so I thought, as I hadn't one, it was no use trying again, but I listened to the singing, and Willie's hymn was one of them they sung."

"Those were not tickets, Maggie—only cards with hymns on them given to every one who came."

"I didn't know that, you see, so I took to going out into the country on Sundays; and once I went into a church, but I had no book, and I couldn't follow, and then I didn't make out the words of the singing either, and the minister got up and spoke such long, hard words. I didn't understand, and soon went to sleep, and only woke up when the music began, as the people went out, so I didn't try that again."

"Poor Maggie, and now to have your leg broken, and your head hurt, too!"

"I don't mind it now, Milly. I'm right glad I was knocked down, or I should not have come here and been found by that dear lady. I can see it now it was the Good Shepherd driving His troublesome sheep into the fold. Oh, Milly, how good of Him to die for such a one as poor Wild Madge! I seem to be almost glad to have the pain to bear, just to show Him I can love anything He lays upon me," and her large eyes filled with grateful tears of joy.

When Maggie was fit to leave the hospital, she went to Mrs. Arnold Houlton's house to recruit her strength before seeking any fresh employment, and there was instructed in household work, in which she soon became very handy, doing everything thoroughly with the strength and energy of her character. Alice's cook and housemaid declared Maggie was a better servant in two months than Milly promised to be after a year's training. Doubtless something was due to the cleverness of her hands with whatever they were put to, but also Maggie's aim was now to do all to the Lord, and not to man only—her ambition to adorn the doctrine of God her Saviour in all things as a Christian servant. She had been forgiven much and she loved much. The thought how to please the Heavenly Master, Christ, was the sunshine of her being now. If she used the one talent to the best of her power, maybe He would entrust her one day with something more to serve Him with.

She thankfully accepted the situation of general servant to Edwin Cole's widowed mother, where she lived, valued highly, till Mrs. Cole's death, finding time, amidst all the work of a large family, to do many an act of self-denying love amongst the poor in that country village.

CHAPTER XII.

In God's great field of labour,
All work is not the same ;
He hath a service for each one,
Who loves His holy name.—*F.R.H.*

ARNOLD had the pleasure of welcoming his mother beneath his roof on the occasion of the birth of his first child, a bonnie boy, and she remained till Alice was strong enough to accompany her back to Downton Park. Arnold took a week's holiday then, but left his wife and child for a longer sojourn, promising to spend another week when he came to fetch them home. Alfred went back with him to keep him company, spending hours each day at the vicarage, and became confirmed in his desire to take holy orders as soon as he should have passed through college life, which he hoped to enter upon in about a couple of years. Henry wished to become an architect, and was pupil to one in the neighbourhood. Three years had elapsed since Arnold's marriage, and his young brothers had become staunch abstainers, and no wonder, with the beacon before their eyes. Robert's habits had increased upon him. At one time there seemed some hope of reformation, but again relapses followed. His first children had breathed but a few hours, sacrificed to the frequent terrors the young mother experienced from her husband's violent fits of excitement when under the

influence of drink. Warned that he was endangering his wife's life also by his habits, he, for a while, turned over a new leaf, and rejoiced in the birth of a healthy boy. The rejoicing at the christening of the first grandson became a snare to the proud father, and he had to be assisted upstairs, and kept out of his wife's sight. His tyrant soon bound his chains afresh about him, and the mother found solace in her beautiful boy, whom she scarcely trusted out of her presence. She was glad to see his father's fondness when caressing the child in the earlier part of the day before going to the office, but she dreaded his touching it on his return from town. Under his father's eye he dared not indulge, and kept straight during business hours, but he compensated himself ere he reached home, and his too lively tones sent a chill through his wife as she heard his step. Having brought home a friend to dinner, he insisted on ringing to have the child brought down in spite of the remonstrance of the mother, who, seeing she should only provoke a scene, was fain to be silent. The decanter before him testified that he had taken too much brandy already. When the nurse appeared, and was passing to take the child to its mother at her bidding, Robert Houlton angrily snatched it away from her arms, and dandling it, jumped it higher and higher, as the little fellow crowed, well pleased, till with unsteady gait, and eyes swimming, he caught only empty space in his hands, and the infant fell with a heavy thud to the oak-floar, first striking the sharp edge of the table as it descended. The mother's scream alone was heard as she sprung to the spot; no

cry came from the infant form—it had received its death-blow, and lay on the mother's lap silent, with the smile still on its lips. The father was sobered now as the words fell on his ears in low but bitter tones, "You have killed him, my own beautiful baby!" The guest drew his host away, and then and there registered a vow never again to touch strong drink himself. Of course the verdict on the inquest was accidental death, but the owner of Downton Park knew his grandson was another victim martyred by strong drink, and the arrow of death had come from his own distillery again.

"If you have no self-control, and that is patent, Robert, to all, you had better follow Arnold's system and give up intoxicants," was his father's advice, the morning after the sad catastrophe.

"Better in its quiet grave and safe in its Saviour's arms than grow up to inherit its father's tendency," was the grandmother's comment as she prepared to go to her sorrowing daughter-in-law.

This event had occurred a few weeks before Arnold's boy was born, and he was thankful to see the impression had not yet passed away. Robert was staying at Downton Park, and confined himself to light wine, and talked of becoming a water-drinker. Arnold again urged him to take the step. The bereaved mother had gone away to her father's home, and refused to return to her own at present. On the Sabbath, when the brothers were standing together by the little row of infants' graves, as the father was laying some choice blossoms on the spot, Arnold pleaded again—"Robert, do take the pledge on this

hallowed ground, not in any strength of your own, but with God's help, and Emma will take fresh heart, and be encouraged to come back with renewed hope and love revived to your side."

"I don't mean to touch anything strong again, Arnold, I assure you, but it's unnecessary to pledge myself; it would be absurd and inconsistent as a distiller myself."

All arguments were vain, and Arnold could only pray for his unhappy brother, that God would show him his danger, and deliver him in His own way. He took home after his next visit his wife and precious child, and grieved over the careworn faces he left behind him at Downton.

Alice returned joyfully to her happy active life at Birmingham, though she had been glad to see her relations and old friends, and hoped she had been able to bring cheer and comfort during her visit. From none did she receive warmer welcome on her return than from the old clerk's wife, Mrs. Grey, whose life had been changed by Alice's kindly ministrations. Many a tempting delicacy, besides fruit and flowers, were brought by her hand, and her voice, whether reading or singing a hymn, "never made her head ache, as other people's always did," she said. It was a work of loving patience, for at first Alice found no response to any comfort she would fain have pointed her to in the sacred page, and she could not find the key to unlock her reserve. But at last the ice melted one day, and the aged one told her tale of grief; her only son had gone away, after getting into trouble fifteen years before, and she had no

tidings of him. "Why had God dealt so hardly with her?"

It was a question too hard Alice felt for her to solve. She was induced to say God's dealings were *never hard* really but sent in love, yet in presence of such a sorrow, and to one so much her senior, and who apparently had been a child of God before she was born, what could she say?

"I suppose it is not easy for us to see, now, how all trials are sent in love, but we shall know hereafter, and must walk by faith here, for it is written, 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.' So we know it must be so. I am so much obliged to you for telling me, dear Mrs. Grey, because now I can always pray about your sorrows and for your son."

The next visit the confession came from the invalid. "I've been very rebellious all these years. I read over that verse after you left, and the following ones, and I see how I have despised the chastening of the Lord, and fainted when rebuked of Him—kicked against His dealings. I begin to think I've been a very poor Christian all my life, and can only come to be forgiven for all my sinful murmurings."

"He will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax till He send forth judgment unto victory," repeated Alice, in a low voice, as she clasped the wrinkled hand held out to her.

"That's a word of comfort, my dear; you seem always to know the right word."

"Oh, I wish I did, but I was just thinking of what my godfather said to me lately, that God never lays

any cross any longer than it is needed ; that when it has worked its purpose, and we have found out the lesson He would teach us, and *have learnt* it, He is more glad to remove it even than we are to lose it."

"I've been very slow to learn all these years, but I hope He'll still have patience and teach me now. I'm sure He's been very good to send me such a friend as you after my rebellion."

From this time the change was marked, and the old clerk came home to find something to cheer his sore heart, instead of adding to its burden as before, and he fervently blessed Arnold's young wife. Three years had left their mark on him, but he said truly that his wife did not look three days older. Her health had improved as well as her mind under Alice's loving care. She now had brought her baby-boy to see the old lady, whose delightful encomiums were much enjoyed by the happy young mother. Then sending him away with his nurse, she sat down for a chat.

"I've had such a longing to see you, my dear. See how graciously the Lord has answered my prayer and yours," and she put a letter into her visitor's hand. "Read it yourself. I can only cry for joy over it. My poor boy has come to himself, and, having gone to his Father with the prodigal's cry, he has now written to me to beg his earthly father's forgiveness, and get him to ask Mr. Monson's pardon, and has sent back all the money, with interest of fifteen years on it, just doubling it; but his father paid it all back in instalments the year after he disappeared, so Mr. Monson says he has no claim, and that it is ours of course, to do what we choose with. But, best of all, they all

now believe what *I never doubted a moment*—that our boy's tale *was true* which he wrote to me, that, when carrying the bill to pay, he went into one of those horrid gin-palaces for a glass, sat down because it began to rain, and was drugged and robbed, and then found himself at night outside, with watch, purse, and pocket-book all gone. Fearing his tale would not be believed, he dared not return lest he should be sent to prison for robbing his employer, which is punished the more heavily. He at last enlisted as a soldier, and could not save money then, and dared not discover his locality for fear of prosecution. After ten years' service, he was discharged with good character, and obtained a clerk's situation abroad, where he happened to be when his service was up, and he's been waiting till he could refund the £60 ere he would write. He enlisted under the name of Frank Sydney, dropping his surname Grey."

"Oh! I'm *so glad*, dear Mrs. Grey; and is he coming home?" The next moment Alice regretted the words, as a shadow crossed the mother's face.

"No, he is very far away, but I shall meet him one day above—my own dear boy! And my husband is so happy; the load is gone from his heart, and Mr. Monson came to see me, and spoke so kindly."

Mr. Monson's kindness did not end in words; he wrote to make inquiries which, proving very satisfactory, he offered the son of his old clerk a desk in his counting-house, if he liked to return, to be near his parents in their old age. The salary was not so good as he was getting abroad, but he believed he could be a comfort, and accepted the post gratefully,

and found the sum he had sent untouched, which he expended in comforts for his mother, devoting himself to watching over the old age of those whom he had so long grieved by his silence.

Two years later Arnold's mother paid her second visit to his home on the occasion of a little daughter being added to the nursery. Mrs. Houlton brought a more favourable report of Robert's habits; he had not been *seen* overcome for six months, but she confessed she did not feel much confidence in his stability, nor share her husband's sentiment, that he was glad now his son had not gone in for teetotalism. Moderation was much better in his opinion, and did not give rise to so much remark. However, Mr. Houlton enjoyed his glass alone, for neither his wife or sons ever partook of any intoxicants, and Robert's wife had never touched any since her baby's sad death. The empty nursery had no fresh occupant, and she did not hesitate to say she was glad of it; her faith had never been restored in her husband, but some of the early love had revived; when kneeling in that lone nursery she had found her Saviour, and owned He had drawn her into the kingdom by taking her treasures there before her. Feeling her own need of pardoning mercy, she learnt to forgive her husband and pray for him, who as yet, alas, prayed not for himself, but clung to his self-indulgence. One morning, a few weeks after his mother had returned to Downton, her visit having been curtailed by Mr. Houlton's having an unusually severe attack of gout, Arnold was greeted by Mr. Monson with the remark, "I hope your father will

not be a loser; I suppose his premises are fully insured?"

Arnold did not often open the newspaper before going to the counting-house; the early hours were given to happy reading of the Scriptures with Alice, and a visit to the nursery. There was always the *Times* at the office to take up at any leisure moment.

Arnold inquired to what Mr. Monson alluded. The paragraph was pointed out to him: "Great fire in — Street; wholesale destruction of the extensive distilleries of Houlton & Son."

Arnold held his breath, and then gave a sigh of relief.

"I do hope my father will not re-embark in the same business; I'm sure he has had a sickening of it. I really cannot write to *condole*; it would be hypocrisy."

"Then you do not fear any loss to your father?"

"Oh! no, he has always been heavily insured; the companies made a fresh demand this year for some greater risk, and they were fully justified in exacting heavier premium, as the sequel proves, for there is no staying the flames when once they get way in such a concern."

Arnold wrote to his mother to express the hope that the shock had not aggravated his father's illness, who had been confined to his room and unable to use his right hand for some weeks. Alfred replied, begging his brother to come down without delay, as no one could do anything with his father, who raved like a madman since receiving some disagreeable letter from the Insurance Company. Robert had kept aloof after

one stormy interview with his father, and his mother was longing for his presence and advice. Arnold left by next train, and found his worst anticipations realised ; the riches gained by that which had ruined thousands, body and soul, were swept away in a single night. The insurance was void through Robert's inattention to business, having relapsed into his former habits when the check of his father's presence was removed. Some new machinery had been added, the conditions demanded for greater security had not been complied with, and the secretary of the company had written, returning the premium, and refusing to receive it till the stipulated precautions were carried out. Two letters from the company having been left unacknowledged for ten days or more, they concluded the insurance had been, as threatened by Robert, transferred to some other office. These letters were found unopened in Robert's greatcoat pocket by his wife with other papers, which she handed over to Arnold, who was entrusted with looking into the business of the firm. Robert had given way to his habits so violently since the fire as to be incapable of rendering any assistance to his brother. At his one interview with his father he had been cursed by him as the cause of their ruin, and he drowned all painful reflections in his libations.

The head clerk informed Arnold that, for the last week prior to the fire, he had taken on himself to open and attend to all letters that came after the morning delivery, seeing Robert was not capable of doing so. But, unfortunately, the two letters of such paramount importance had been received before this

precaution was adopted. Arnold's quiet tones and clear head had more effect in calming his father than anything else, and his mother clung to her eldest son as her best earthly comforter. He believed that with what could be realised by the sale of Downton Park, added to his mother's private fortune, never invested in the firm, a comfortable income would still be retained, though the change from thousands to hundreds seemed poverty to those accustomed to luxury of every description. Arnold persuaded his parents to take up their abode for some weeks in his house till all was settled. Soon after the fire he had a talk with his younger brothers, who looked up to him with implicit confidence; they must henceforth depend on their own exertions, and would be none the less happy on this account, he told them, as he could speak by experience. Henry was now about to receive a salary, having finished his two years as pupil at the architect, and to remain in the neighbourhood in his altered circumstances, when Downton Park should have passed into other hands, would be trying, so Arnold offered to inquire for employment elsewhere in the same line for him. But Henry confessed the petty mortification was more than compensated to him by remaining in the vicinity of one to whom he had become attached, and for whom he would be content to work and wait—the daughter of a neighbouring clergyman, whose curate could board and lodge him at a convenient distance from his employment. Alfred, whilst striving to comfort his parents, and maintaining a cheerful bearing in their presence, broke down when alone with Arnold.

"You must think me very weak; a poor, faint-hearted soldier of the Cross," he exclaimed, "but it does seem so hard to give up Cambridge, and going into the church, yet I am ready to take a clerkship; could you get me one in your firm?"

"I do not think your health, though so much improved, could stand office-work in town, Alfie, my boy."

"Then can I do nothing but be a burden?"

"I did not say that, far from it. I think I could get you a tutorship for a year or two, which would enable you to pay your own expenses at Cambridge. I was asked, only the week before I left, if I knew of a suitable one for the three boys of a rich widow lady living just out of Birmingham. The train would take you to the park gates nearly, and the walk home in the fine weather would only refresh you."

"Oh, Arnold, it's more than I deserve for my wicked murmuring, but do you think mother could live in Birmingham. The doctor has often advised her spending the winter abroad."

"No, I don't think it would do for any time for her. I mean to recommend father to take her abroad before the cold weather sets in. Perhaps the winter might be spent abroad in future, where living is much cheaper, and the summer passed in England, but my home will be yours and Henry's at all times, when you do not need to be elsewhere."

Alfred's reply was laying his hand in his brother's and his head on his shoulder, as in earlier years.

These plans were carried out during the next few months. Robert was the greatest difficulty, and his

debts diminished the amount saved from the wreck. His wife's father offered them a small house within his grounds, where he could keep an eye on his son-in-law, and afford the comfort his daughter needed in the solace of her own family. At first Robert resented and refused to be treated as a school-boy, as he termed it, but finding beggars can't be choosers, submitted, and lived to be thankful for the strong hand kept over him till he became an abstainer on principle, and was taken into business by his wife's brother.

Alfred, after passing through his college career with honour as a student and a Christian, eventually became rector of a parish adjoining his brother Arnold's country place, where many happy family gatherings took place. The little girl, Annie, rescued by Arnold in the hospital, and brought up under his mother's housekeeper, became in time under-nurse to his children. The burglar's son never knew his father's dishonour, as he did not survive his sentence, having ruined his health by his habits of indulgence, but the boy knew his mother was an honoured, trusted servant, and he grew up in the same service, and was proud to groom the young gentleman's pony. Milly only left her kind mistress to accede to the importunity of Jim, and settled in a cottage in the village, her husband being employed in the gardens. Maggie, at the death of Mrs. Cole, voluntarily left the sweets of the country so dear to her, to fill the post of nurse at the hospital in the large town where her early life had been passed. Her devoted attendance on her mistress during her long illness had proved

her fitness for the post, which had been offered to her by the medical man. Where she had received the message of life herself, she now carried it to many, and looked forward to Alice Houlton's visits, still continued there, as one of the recompenses of her work. One day an old man was brought in in a dying state through exhaustion and exposure during a severe winter; he lingered a few days, revived by the nourishment and care. Before he passed away, after fastening his gaze repeatedly on Maggie, he told her she was the image of one he had loved in his early days, and asked her history, and Maggie found she was ministering to the father who had deserted wife and child, and who confessed he would have had his desert had he died in the cold street. Maggie could only hope that the dying man's repentance was sincere, and the faith, though trembling, true, that drank in from her lips the story of the Cross and its atoning sacrifice. These and many more were the blessed fruits of—ARNOLD'S RESOLVE.

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